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DOES CAPITALISM HAVE A FUTURE?
MATTHEW CONTINETTI • IRWIN M. STELZER

PANICKING DEMOCRATS

FRED BARNES
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PLUS

OBAMA & TERROR: THE SYSTEM THAT DIDN'T WORK

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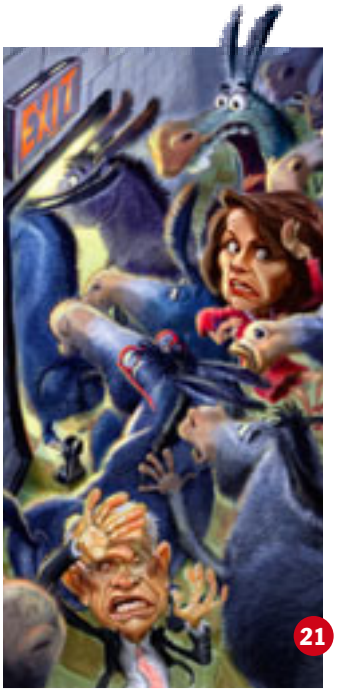

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No Way, E.J.

The Scrapbook enjoys a good chuckle every morning, to start off the day. And what better way to do it than to turn to the op-ed pages of the *Washington Post* and get a dose of E.J. Dionne Jr.?

Of course, The Scrapbook takes E.J. Dionne Jr. very seriously: He is, in addition to being an ex-Rhodes Scholar, twice-weekly *Post* columnist, and the author of three books, a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution, a University Professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture at Georgetown University's Public Policy Institute, and a commentator on (where else?) National Public Radio.

He has also—there is no other way to put it—become an unapologetic partisan hack. It's never very difficult to discern when Dionne has been the lucky recipient of a special briefing at the White House or club sandwiches in the Senate majority leader's dining room. Republicans are forever "mouthing" outlandish notions or "claiming" something ridiculous or "shouting down" people of decency and otherwise disgracing the body politic; Democrats are the party of the sensible center, good ideas, clean living, and the wisdom of experience. Like any popular newspaper feature, a Dionne column is entirely, incessantly, unremittingly predictable.

Take his recent tribute to Nevada senator Harry Reid, Democratic boss and mastermind of the health care "reform" spectacle ("Two cheers for Harry Reid," December 28). It would be difficult to find a more personally unpleasant or officially repugnant figure on Capitol Hill than Reid, whose prickly, defensive demeanor hides a nasty disposition and is likely to lead to defeat this fall. But tell that to E.J. Dionne Jr.! "You bet he made deals," Dionne writes, to produce a bill "that is the most far-reaching piece of social legislation since the 1960s."

That is one way to look at it, and Dionne is entitled to his opinion. But what caught The Scrapbook's eye the other morning was the thoroughly disingenuous means by which Dionne set the stage for his fawning tribute. One common practice of journalism in Washington, he says, "involves almost everyone beating up on the same politician at the same time." For awhile the victim of this ritual was Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who "was cast as a 'San Francisco liberal' out of touch with the 'real America.'" But as Dionne points out, Pelosi is really like her late father, a 1950s Baltimore mayor, "a highly practical local politician more concerned with delivering the goods than with passing ideological litmus tests."

Sounds like Speaker Pelosi to us! So having recognized the error of its ways about Pelosi, the capital press corps pushed her out of the crosshairs and substituted Harry Reid—which infuriates Dionne. "There is a rote quality to the attacks on Reid that flies in the face of what he's accomplished," he explains.

To which The Scrapbook can only ask: Is E.J. Dionne Jr. living on the same planet as anyone who follows the news and reads opinion journalism? It is true that both Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid have been subject to criticism—perhaps even derided as "out of touch with the 'real America'"—but not by Washington pundits, or the mainstream media. Conservative blogs, certainly, and right-leaning publications, no doubt—but the Washington press corps?

This is what is known, in the column-writing business, as setting up a straw man in order to accomplish what is otherwise impossible. Which, when you think about it, was the task confronting E.J. Dionne Jr. when he set out to write "Two cheers for Harry Reid." ♦

The Archbishop Weighs In

Seldom has a country been more frightened by a number than Great Britain was in October by the projection of its Office of National Statistics that the country's population would rise to 70 million by 2029—mostly due to immigration. Sixty million people now live cheek-by-jowl on that sceptred isle. An increase of 10 million means 15 percent population growth by the end of next decade, heavily concentrated in the most crowded parts of England, with the great bulk of it due to immigration.

A broad coalition has now been founded to reconfigure immigration policies to prevent that projection from becoming reality. Balanced Migration is chaired by Frank Field (a rather conservative member of parliament for the Labour party) and Nicholas Soames (a Tory MP and Winston Churchill's grandson). The group issued a declaration last week noting the worrisome rise of the fascistic British National party, which got a million votes in last summer's European elections, including 10 percent of the vote in Yorkshire.

The BNP is on the rise because it is the only party that has dared mention immigration of late. Soames and Field warn, darkly but logically, that

NATE BEELER

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"failure to take action would be seriously damaging to the future harmony of our society." The manifesto is backed by a surprising mix of politicians from left and right, including the Keynes biographer and historian Robert (Lord) Skidelsky and George Carey, a member of the House of Lords who was formerly the archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Church of England.

Carey's participation is stunning for several reasons. The Anglican church has been in the forefront of *bien-pensant* thinking on immigration and multiculturalism. Two years ago, Carey's successor, Rowan Williams, controversially called for more *sharia* in British life. In a January 7 column for the London *Times*, Carey speaks in the same tone, welcoming "the contribution of both economic migrants and asylum seekers to our lively cosmopolitan culture." But he goes on to profess disdain for Prime Minister Gordon Brown's exclusive praise of such universal values as "tolerance, fair play and pluralism." Carey likes those things as much as the next guy, but he thinks that what makes Britain British is British values and he calls on immigrants to "respect the Christian nature and history of our nation."

This may sound minor to anyone steeped in the American culture wars. But in the context of the much tamer British debate, Carey's participation in the Balanced Migration manifesto is a debate-changing defection from the consensus of the British cultural establishment. ♦

WHAT THE BODY SCAN DOES NOT REVEAL.

Stealth Unionization Revisited

Readers who shared our wonderment at the state of Michigan's bizarre unionization of home day care providers (see our December 28 issue) will be interested to learn the outcome of the lawsuit challenging the state's move: The Michigan Court of Appeals last week dismissed it without explanation.

The practical effect is that tens of thousands of home day care entrepreneurs will continue to have their pockets picked by the Michigan Department of Human Services. The department will continue to subtract "union dues" from the checks it sends to day care providers who look after children receiving a public subsidy so that their parents can work. These "dues" redirect nearly $4 million a year from the modest earnings of women who watch children to the coffers of the CCPTM, an entity ginned up by the United Auto Workers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees to extend their power.

The political effect? How about a campaign issue for whoever carries the Republican banner in this fall's election to replace term-limited Democratic governor Jennifer Granholm? Sure, Michigan is a union-friendly state. But its voters can recognize a con. Sherry

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Loar, one of the day care providers on whose behalf the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation sued, is married to a union member. But she knows she personally never joined a union. How could she when she's self-employed? By what right, she asks, does the government take "union dues" out of the reimbursements it owes her?

Whether or not the Mackinac Center decides to appeal, it's an issue that just might resonate in a year replete with indications that voters are sick and tired of government high-handedness. ♦

The Profiler

'Profiling" would seem like common sense—a Nigerian Islamist is more likely to try and blow up an airliner than, say, a Canadian grandmother. Of course that doesn't mean you can just assume that the 83-year-old Canadian woman sitting next to you on the plane *isn't* plotting to kill you. But you should be more concerned about the 23-year-old Nigerian sweating bullets on the other side of the aisle while he flicks his Bic in the vicinity of his underwear.

Right? Not so, said Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, on the website of the *New York Times* this week, which hosted a debate on the topic "Will Profiling Make a Difference?" "Profiling communities in counterterrorism efforts is ineffective," Marayati asserted.

> Focus on one particular ethnicity or country of origin, and the terrorists will recruit from somewhere else. Many terrorism suspects came from within the United States and European Union countries.

You would think it would be a major accomplishment in the fight against violent extremism (or whatever we're calling it these days) if al Qaeda were suddenly forced to recruit from among Scottish Presbyterians or the Pennsylvania Mennonites. Al-Marayati, though, is only delivering the conventional left-wing message that increased scrutiny of suspicious looking men with suspicious sounding names is . . . suspicious.

But Al-Marayati is an odd messenger for the *Times* to have selected. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, he took to the airwaves in Los Angeles to speculate about the perpetrators. The *Times* itself quoted Al-Marayati in October 2001 as having said,

> If we're going to look at suspects, we should look to the groups that benefit the most from these kinds of incidents, and I think we should put the state of Israel on the suspect list, because I think this [the 9/11 attacks] diverts attention from what's happening in the Palestinian territories so that they can go on with their aggression and occupation and apartheid policies.

So Marayati isn't opposed to "profiling," after all. He just wants to focus on one particular country of origin. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'I confess to feeling only slightly more rational than *Misery*'s Kathy Bates. I want to strap Ellen Goodman into a chair and make her keep writing columns. Goodman, whose prose has graced newspaper pages for more than four decades . . . " ("To Ellen with Love," Kathleen Parker, *Washington Post*, January 6). ♦

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Father Time

For the last many years, my New Year's Eves have had a ritual sameness: Put on my party heels, pour several warm-up pops, then take off for a friend's house to join him, his lovely wife, and a circle of regulars, who, as my friend delicately puts it, "come to watch you make an ass of yourself." It's an evening full of bellicose singing, filthy limericks, libidinous overtures, and tearful confessions. That's when my wife usually says, "Are you done? We're here. Time to get out of the car."

Once inside, we play a game called Salad Bowl, in which players give their team clues about words written on slips of paper by other players, drawn from a bowl. The women write the names of famous people or things. The men tend to favor popular euphemisms for unspeakable acts that would draw a suspended sentence with heavy community service if practiced in large swaths of the Bible Belt. Around midnight, somebody half-heartedly suggests turning on Ryan Seacrest in Times Square to see if his ball has dropped. But by then, deeply into our own besotted rhythm, we quickly return to barking out "Phoenix Flugelhorn!" or "Crisco Pole Vault!" and watching our wives/designated drivers recoil in horror.

I don't typically welcome hangovers, but my New Year's Day one is practically restorative. The physical discomfort helps mute the mental anguish that inevitably accompanies the turning of the year. Unlike most people, I bypass the disheartening crush of destined-for-failure resolutions. Maybe this year I'll try to pay my back taxes or let my aged uncle out of the padlocked tool shed—we'll see how it goes. But ever since I was a kid, I've been acutely aware of time's passage, and my inability to halt it.

For me, January 1 is always a disquieting marker, since, as T.S. Eliot wrote, "Last year's words belong to last year's language, and next year's words await another voice." It somehow feels as though you leave the old life that went before that date behind, and you must start over and reconnect with it for it to count as part of your present. So the simplest things—the first call to family members, the first story written, the first fish caught—take on pressing significance.

DAVID GOTHARD

This year, however, we broke with tradition. Felled by flu and without a babysitter, my wife and I stayed home with the kids. We played games, sent them off to bed, then slow-danced at midnight in front of the fireplace right into 2010. A few hours later, I went to see my two sons in their bunk bed, dead asleep, wishing to be the first person they saw this new decade. As I patted the head of Luke, who is 10, he bolted upright, wiping sleep from his panicked eyes. "No worries," I said, "just wanted to tell you Happy New Year, pal." He looked alarmed, as if someone had cut his Christmas vacation short and was shuffling him off to school.

Luke wasn't the only one afraid that he'd been pickpocketed by time. I remember where I was exactly 10 years ago this evening: hunkered down at my in-laws' house to ring in the new century. My sister-in-law played "Auld Lang Syne" at the stroke of midnight—the Kenny G "Millennium Mix" version that was popular that year. Unable to accept that the last century I'd ever live through had been inaugurated by Kenny G, I snuck off to a back room where a two-month-old Luke slept in a baby carrier so I could rock him until the song was over.

I can now only dimly recall the new-parent apprehension, how the specter of having this strange being in my charge for at least the next 18 years looked like a sprawling infinity of duty and expense and obligation. But I don't remember much more. Just that I blinked, and now here we are, me driving with the parking brake on, futilely trying to slow time down, to keep him a kid as long as he's willing to stay one.

Later this New Year's Day I took off for my home river, needing to catch my first fish of the year. I caught 26 instead. I don't believe in omens, though now might be a good time to start. Maybe the New Year isn't so intimidating after all. Nor the decade that will unfold behind it. The one that will see my kids become adults. Why get spooked by the 10 years to come?

That's all the time in the world. Isn't it?

Matt Labash

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Obama's Twelve Days of Christmas

On the first day of Christmas, we were attacked.

On the second day of Christmas, the enemy combatant who had been dispatched from Yemen to attack us—who boarded a plane to Detroit with a valid multiple-entry visa despite our having been warned about him by his father, despite his having spent months with an al Qaeda leader in Yemen who was closely monitored by U.S. intelligence, and despite his buying a one-way ticket with cash and boarding without luggage—was arraigned before a judge, provided with a lawyer, and informed of his right to remain silent. The Transportation Security Administration ordered that airplane passengers remain seated for the final hour of all flights. President Obama remained silent.

On the third day of Christmas, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and White House spokesman Robert Gibbs went on the Sunday talk shows to assure Americans that "the system worked."

On the fourth day of Christmas, the president interrupted his vacation in Hawaii to "assure" the American people that, basically, all was well: "An alert and courageous citizenry are far more resilient than an isolated extremist."

On the fifth day of Christmas, the president came off the golf course to speak again. He now told us of some "serious concerns" that had been raised by the Christmas day incident—it turned out a "systemic failure" had occurred that allowed for a "potential catastrophic breach of security."

On the sixth day of Christmas, the head of the National Counterterrorism Center continued the ski vacation he had left for the day after Christmas, and the director of the Central Intelligence Agency continued to enjoy his holiday on the West Coast.

On the seventh day of Christmas, the White House issued a statement that the president had spoken that morning with his two nonvacationing terrorism advisers, Napolitano and Deputy Assistant to the President John Brennan, and that he had called a meeting for Tuesday when everyone was back in Washington.

On the eighth day of Christmas, everyone celebrated the New Year.

On the ninth day of Christmas, the president told us that the extremist wasn't isolated, after all. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula had "trained," "equipped," and "directed" Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to attack the United States.

On the tenth day of Christmas, John Brennan was a guest on all the Sunday news talk shows. He explained that Abdulmutallab "received training" at one of several terror training camps in Yemen and that "he was clearly directed to carry out this attack [by] al Qaeda, the senior leadership there. This is something that we're very concerned about. We're concerned that they may be, in fact, trying to get other operatives, non-Yemenis and others, to train inside of Yemen, to send to the West."

Brennan nonetheless defended treating Abdulmutallab as a criminal suspect, saying we could plea bargain with the terrorist in return for information he might have about Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and about other attackers who might be on the way. Brennan also reiterated the Obama administration's intention to continue paroling terror detainees to Yemen as part of the Obama quest to close Guantánamo.

On the eleventh day of Christmas, President Obama arrived back in Washington.

On the twelfth day of Christmas, the State Department announced that Abdulmutallab's visa had been revoked.

On the feast of the Epiphany, Obama's national security adviser told *USA Today* that Americans would feel "a certain shock" when they saw the report that was to be released the next day.

And Americans did feel "a certain shock"—not so much from the report as from Napolitano's profession of surprise at al Qaeda's "tactic of using an individual to foment an attack." Meanwhile, Brennan expressed alarm about cooperation between Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Al Qaeda in Pakistan, and about the fact that Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was "actually launching individuals here."

So, two weeks after the Christmas attack, the Obama administration may finally have awakened to the fact that we are facing an ongoing threat from a sophisticated global terror group with at least two capable and connected nodes, in Pakistan/Afghanistan and in Yemen. And that there are people being trained we probably don't know about, in places we may not have yet discovered, to attack the United States of America. And they don't take Christmas vacations.

We presume the Obama administration's Christmas vacation is over. It would be good if they also abandoned their yearlong attempt to take a holiday from history.

—*William Kristol*

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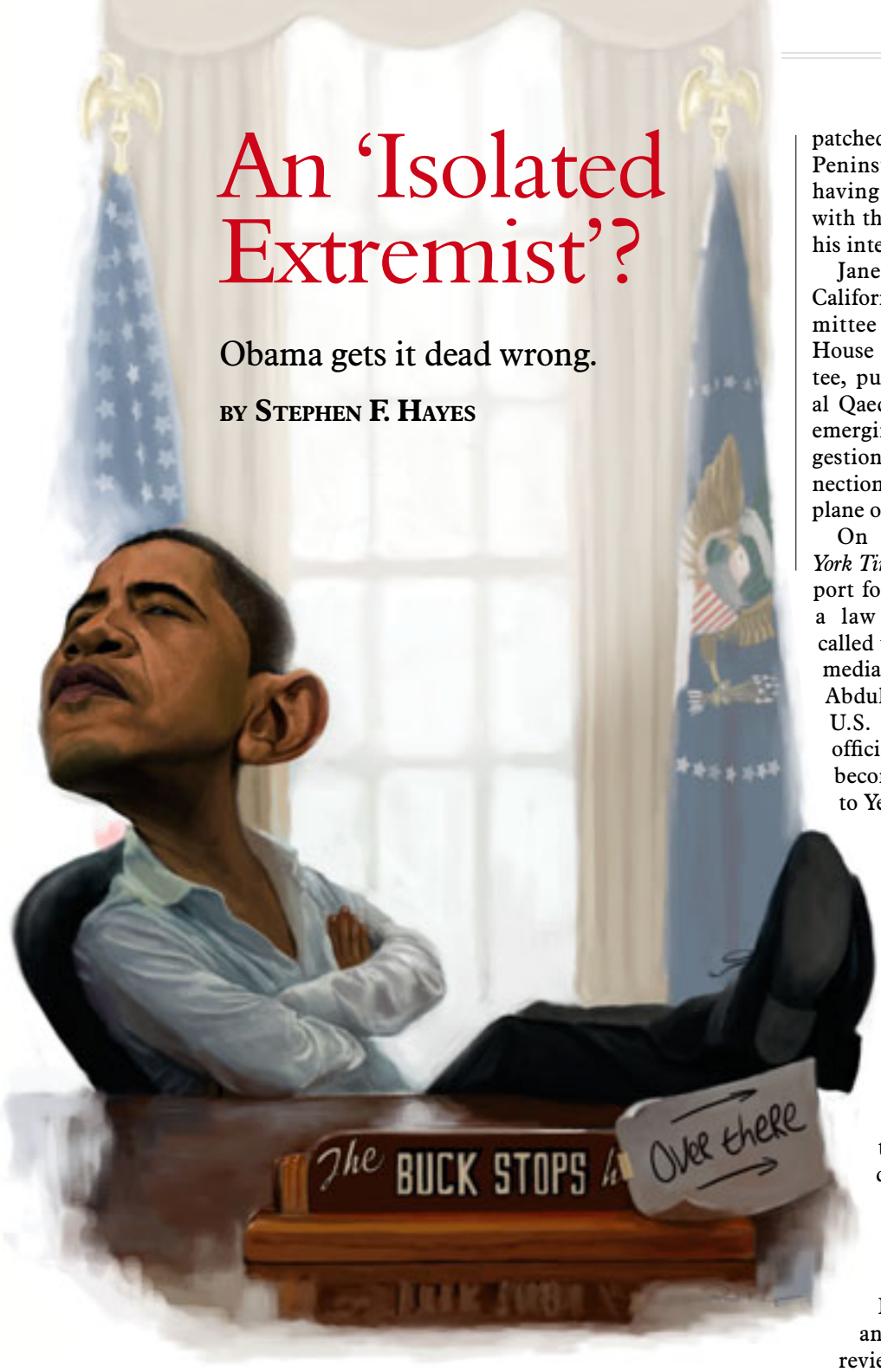
An 'Isolated Extremist'?

Obama gets it dead wrong.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES



PAUL MOYSE

On Monday December 28, three days after Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab tried to bring down Northwest Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit, President Barack Obama stepped up to a podium in Honolulu, to make his first statement about the attacks. "This incident, like several that have preceded it, demonstrates that an alert and courageous citizenry are far more resilient than an isolated extremist," he said.

But Abdulmutallab was not an isolated extremist. He had been dispatched by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula to kill Americans after having spent four months training with them in Yemen. He told this to his interrogators.

Jane Harman, a Democrat from California and chair of the subcommittee on intelligence under the House Homeland Security Committee, put out a statement about the al Qaeda links. "The facts are still emerging, but there are strong suggestions of a Yemen-Al Qaeda connection and an intent to blow up the plane over U.S. airspace."

On Sunday morning, the *New York Times* reported on al Qaeda support for Abdulmutallab and quoted a law enforcement official who called the reports "plausible." Other media reports included the fact that Abdulmutallab's father had warned U.S. diplomats and intelligence officials in Nigeria that his son had become a radical and had moved to Yemen.

How is it possible that the president of the United States could get a central fact about an attempted terrorist attack—arguably, the central fact—dead wrong in his first public statement, three days after the attack?

President Obama and White House staffers have spent the subsequent two weeks pointing fingers at the intelligence community, detailing the many failures of the bureaucracy, and promising accountability. Given what we know about those failures, that's appropriate. But in his January 7 statement announcing the results of the review he had ordered, the president boldly declared that the buck stops with him. Strong rhetoric. So what does it mean in practice? The Obama administration's lack of seriousness on counterterrorism before the attack seems to have been rivaled only by its incompetence afterwards.

Some of the incompetence is well-known. Janet Napolitano's famous declaration that "the system worked"

Stephen F. Hayes is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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has been the subject of much well-deserved mockery. But the problem was not with Napolitano alone. White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said much the same thing in an appearance the same day on *Face the Nation*.

When the top spokesman for an administration makes the same argument as a cabinet secretary, it's because that is the message the White House has decided to emphasize. And on the Sunday after the botched attack, the White House wanted the country to believe the system had worked.

The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) was created in 2004 for the purpose of coordinating intelligence among the many agencies that make up the U.S. intelligence community. The NCTC essentially exists to make sure the strands of intelligence like those the U.S. government had on Abdulmutallab are brought together to prevent an attack.

Michael Leiter, the head of the NCTC, spent Christmas Day on the job. He left the day after, having gotten permission of the White House and the director of national intelligence. John Brennan, President Obama's top counterterrorism adviser, explained the decision at a press conference on January 7.

> Mike Leiter raised with me that he was in fact scheduled to go on leave to meet his son, and he asked me whether or not he should cancel that trip. I asked Mike about whether or not he had a full complement of folks and his deputy was going to be in place. Mike said he did. And I said, "Mike, no, you deserve this vacation, you need to be with your son." So I was the one who told him he should go out there.

Under any circumstances, Leiter should have remained at the NCTC to help determine how such an intelligence failure could have happened. But there was a truly pressing reason for him to stick around and do his job. Abdulmutallab had told interrogators that there were others to follow. The concerns were serious enough that Obama surged the number of federal air marshals on airplanes.

And when Brennan was asked about connecting those dots, he said:

> The National Counterterrorism Center has been working day and night for—since this December 25th attempted attack—has been scouring all of the databases—identities databases as well as all-source databases—to make those correlations. And I'm confident that they have done that very thoroughly.

So at precisely the same time the staff of the NCTC was working furiously to piece together bits of intelligence to prevent another attack, the director was on a White House-approved vacation?

When the top spokesman makes the same argument as a cabinet secretary, it's because that is the message the White House has decided to emphasize. The White House wanted the country to believe the system had worked.

That wasn't the only troubling thing to come out of the January 7 press conference, which Brennan conducted jointly with Janet Napolitano. One reporter asked the officials to name the most surprising thing they learned from the Obama administration's 12-day review of the Flight 253 incident.

> Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is an extension of Al Qaeda core coming out of Pakistan. And in my view, it is one of the most lethal, one of the most concerning of it. The fact that they had moved forward to try to execute this attack against the homeland I think demonstrated to us—and this is what the review sort of uncovered—that we had a strategic sense of sort of where they were going, but we didn't know they had progressed to the point of actually launching individuals here. And we have taken that lesson, and so now we're all on top of it.

So John Brennan, the president's top counterterrorism adviser, was surprised that an al Qaeda affiliate that had promised to attack the United States had almost succeeded in doing so.

Napolitano, who once caused a minor diplomatic kerfuffle by claiming erroneously that the 9/11 hijackers had come through Canada, said:

> I think, following up on that, not just the determination of Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, but the tactic of using an individual to foment an attack, as opposed to a large conspiracy or a multiperson conspiracy, such as we saw on 9/11, that is something that affects intelligence. It really emphasizes now the renewed importance on how different intelligence is integrated and analyzed and threat streams are followed through. And, again, it will impact how we continue to review the need to improve airport security around the world.

So the secretary of homeland security was surprised by the determination of an al Qaeda affiliate and shocked that they used an individual to conduct an attack.

The next day, two weeks after the attack, the White House tested out a new line showing how the president was outsmarting the terrorists.

As reported in the *Washington Post*:

> Obama has struggled to strike the right tone about the failed attack, initially waiting three days to address the incident publicly. His advisers said the delay was in part designed to deprive al Qaeda of the public relations benefit that would come with an alarmed presidential reaction.

Really? How is it damaging to al Qaeda to first call the attack the work of "an isolated extremist"—and then have to acknowledge a plot that escaped the notice of the U.S. intelligence community? ♦

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A Few Bad Men

The Obama administration's astonishing decision to send six Gitmo terrorists to Yemen.

BY THOMAS JOSCELYN

Last Tuesday, President Obama updated the American people on the progress of the "security reviews" he had ordered administration officials to perform in the wake of "the failed attack on Christmas Day." The president spoke of the "corrective actions" that would be taken so that another bomber with explosives sewn into his underwear could not board a U.S.-bound plane. He trumpeted the security measures he had ordered and said:

> Finally, some have suggested that the events on Christmas Day should cause us to revisit the decision to close the prison at Guantánamo Bay. So let me be clear. It was always our intent to transfer detainees to other countries only under conditions that provide assurances that our security is being protected.
>
> With respect to Yemen in particular, there's an ongoing security situation which we have been confronting for some time, along with our Yemeni partner. Given the unsettled situation, I've spoken to the Attorney General, and we've agreed that we will not be transferring additional detainees back to Yemen at this time.

The Christmas Day attack was planned by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is headquartered in Yemen. AQAP is one of al Qaeda's strongest branches outside of South Asia.

Nearly half of the detainees remaining at Guantánamo are Yemeni. The Yemeni government has a horrible track record when it comes to keeping tabs on terrorists. So Republicans in Congress have argued that repatriating the Yemenis will simply bolster AQAP's ranks. President Obama was clearly sensitive to all of this when he spoke last week.

But he and his administration were not nearly as sensitive to it before Christmas Day.

On December 19, 2009, the Obama administration transferred six detainees to Yemen. Only one Yemeni had been repatriated during the previous 11 months—and the Bush administration, which made many of its own mistakes with respect to detainee transfers, had only repatriated a handful of Yemenis over several years. (At least one of them has since returned to terrorism.) But the Obama administration was confident. The *New York Times* on December 19 cited a "senior administration official" who said the White House was "gaining confidence in Yemen's willingness to handle returning detainees." And at the beginning of last year, in January 2009, Obama's ambassador to Yemen, Stephen Seche, had said the administration intended to repatriate "the majority" of the Yemenis at Guantánamo.

That plan now seems to be on hold. But the question remains: Who are the six former detainees who were transferred in December? The Obama administration refuses to say. During a press conference on January 8, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs blunted any inquiry by saying, "I'm not going to get into discussing transfers."

The Doctor. Ayman Batarfi has been a committed jihadist for decades. After fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, he became an orthopedic surgeon and lent his skills to al Qaeda and the Taliban. He tended to wounded jihadists during the Battle of Tora Bora in late 2001. During his administrative review board hearing at Guantánamo, Batarfi made a number of admissions, including that he met with Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora (when the terror master was the most wanted man on the planet) and had authorized the purchase of medical equipment for a "Malaysian microbiologist." This was Yazid Sufaat, who was the head of al Qaeda's anthrax program. Batarfi also worked for al Wafa, a "charity" that was an al Qaeda front. Both the United States and U.N. have designated al Wafa as a terrorist entity.

The Money Man. Jamal Muhammed Alawi Mari was among the first men taken into custody after the September 11 attacks. Mari was arrested on September 23, 2001. Pakistani officials found a suitcase filled with clothes and $11,300 in cash in his possession and boxes containing "lists of chemicals and pharmaceuticals and handwritten notes regarding the characteristics of different military weapons, explosives and attack scenarios." It was an interesting collection for a man who claimed he was just a charity worker.

Like Batarfi, Mari worked for al Wafa, although he denied this during his hearings at Guantánamo. According to the U.S. government's unclassified files, Mari was chosen to head al Wafa's branch in Karachi, which worked closely with the Taliban in funneling supplies and weaponry into Afghanistan. Mari reported to the head of al Wafa, who had close ties to Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar.

Prior to al Wafa, Mari worked for another known al Qaeda front—a charity called al Haramayn. While al Haramayn claims it is only interested in charitable endeavors, its real mission is to inculcate radical Islam in war-torn countries. Al Haramayn has repeatedly supported extremists and terrorists, including al Qaeda members. U.S. government files allege that Mari was once a top official in the Baku, Azerbaijan, branch of al Haramayn. That branch is known to have played a leading role in funneling supplies and recruits to the jihadists fighting in Chechnya.

A 'Captured Mujahedin.' When U.S. and Pakistani officials raid al Qaeda

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safe houses, they capture not only terrorists, but also valuable bits of hard intelligence—computers, documents, fraudulent passports, memory sticks—that help illuminate the underworld of terrorism. Al Qaeda maintains a fairly robust bureaucracy and with every bureaucracy, there is paperwork. Lists of al Qaeda members maintained by their fellow terrorists are a particularly important find.

Riyad Atiq Ali Abdu al Haf's name, alias, and personal information appeared on three such lists. One was "found on a computer harddrive associated with a known al Qaeda operative" and includes al Haf among the ranks of "captured mujahedin." Another list recovered during a raid on suspected al Qaeda safe houses in Pakistan lists al Haf's "name, aliases and nationality" among more than 320 other Arabic names. Still another document, a "list of al Qaeda mujahedin," contains al Haf's name, alias, and the "contents of his trust account."

After serving in the Yemeni military for one year, al Haf was recruited to wage jihad in South Asia. He stayed in various Taliban safe houses during his travels. Once in Afghanistan, he was allegedly trained at the al Farouq camp—the crown jewel of al Qaeda's pre-9/11 training infrastructure. A fellow al Qaeda operative even identified al Haf as the man who trained him on combat weapons.

Other evidence in U.S. government files indicates that al Haf served on the front lines in Afghanistan against the Northern Alliance and at Tora Bora, where he allegedly delivered food supplies to his fellow fighters. Al Haf was captured near the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Bodyguard. Faruq Ali Ahmed, who memorized the Koran before the age of 17, claims he traveled to Afghanistan simply to teach children how to do the same. Military and intelligence officials at Guantánamo, however, did not believe his story. In a series of memos written between September 8, 2004, and October 10, 2007, U.S. officials alleged that Ahmed was recruited in a known jihadist center in Yemen (where some of the USS *Cole* bombers had been recruited), trained at al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan (including al Farouq), and went on to become a bodyguard at Osama bin Laden's private airport in Kandahar. This airport was one of the most secure al Qaeda facilities in pre-9/11 Afghanistan. Only the most trustworthy members of the group ever served there.

The Students. Fayad Yahya Ahmed al Rami and Muhammad Yasir Ahmed Taher were both allegedly recruited by the Jamaat Tablighi, an Islamic missionary organization that, according to the declassified Guantánamo files, is regularly used by al Qaeda to shuttle terrorists around the globe. The Jamaat Tablighi, which claims to be solely devoted to proselytizing, has a long history of sponsoring jihadists inside Pakistan. Al Rami and Taher were both captured during raids of al Qaeda safe houses operated by Abu Zubaydah—a top al Qaeda

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lieutenant—on March 28, 2002.

Al Rami and Taher claimed they were students at Salafia University living in a residence for foreigners—the Issa House—run by the Jamaat Tablighi. According to court filings, there was "a close relationship" between Zubaydah's safe house and the Issa House, and residents of both were "making preparations to continue to fight" after September 11.

Of the six Yemeni detainees transferred in December, al Rami and Taher are the least worrisome. There is no indication, for example, that they received any terrorist training or actually participated in hostilities. Or it may simply be the case that they had not had the opportunity to fight.

According to memos prepared for Taher's case, he "was sent a personal greeting from the Taliban Deputy Minister of Intelligence" upon his arrival in South Asia, meaning his arrival was expected. Taher was also "recognized by a senior al Qaeda operative" at the Issa House, further indicating that it wasn't just a student dormitory. Taher allegedly made a number of damning comments while at Guantánamo too, asking that he "be considered a terrorist." For his part, al Rami was asked if he believed in jihad during one hearing, and he replied: "I do not believe that any Muslim does not believe in jihad. Even infidels." In other words, everyone believes in jihad—whether they wage it or are its victims.

These are the six men who the Obama administration deemed least likely to pose a threat in the future and transferred to a country with an "ongoing security situation." And there is every indication that the Obama administration would have transferred more if the world had not woken up to the terrorist threat emanating out of Yemen on Christmas Day.

If these were the least worrisome Yemeni detainees held at Guantánamo, then what does that say about the rest of the Yemeni prisoners there? And will the Obama administration reverse course yet again and take a chance in transferring them? ♦

The Man Who'll Kill Obamacare?

Scott Brown's a longshot, but gaining in the race for Ted Kennedy's seat. BY JOHN MCCORMACK

Scott Brown, Republican state senator

ASSOCIATED PRESS / STEVEN SENNE

Boston

Ask a typical 50-year-old Republican running for office when and why he became a Republican, and you'll likely hear a nostalgic story related to Ronald Reagan. Ask GOP Senate candidate Scott Brown, and he replies, "I'd really have to check that far back. I really don't have the time, nor do I care" to do "all this self-analysis." He says he's "fiscally more in tune with the Republicans," but hastens to add that "recently Republicans have kind of lost their way" on such matters.

Welcome to Massachusetts, where Democrats outnumber Republicans three to one and where state senator Brown, who's making a bid for Ted Kennedy's seat in the January 19 special election, would rather point out similarities between himself and JFK and sometimes even Barack Obama. Republicans and Tea Party activists are nonetheless flooding the phone banks and knocking on doors for Brown. "The pro-life movement is really excited," says John Rowe of Massachusetts Citizens for Life. Yet Brown declares on his website that abortion is a decision that should be made by a "woman in consultation with her doctor," i.e., he's (moderately) pro-choice.

No matter. Brown has won the enthusiasm of fiscal and social conservatives and many independents largely by promising to be the "41st vote" to uphold a filibuster against the Democrats' health care legislation, which still needs to pass the House and Senate again before it can become law. While it's possible that Democratic negotiations for a compromise bill could break down on Capitol Hill,

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the best shot at killing the legislation may be electing Brown to the Senate.

A poll released January 5 by Rasmussen Reports startled the political community. It suggested that Brown could conceivably pull off a stunning upset: He was within striking distance of his Democratic opponent, Massachusetts attorney general Martha Coakley. While Brown trailed Coakley 50 percent to 41 percent, Rasmussen noted that "special elections are typically decided by who shows up to vote, and it is clear from the data that Brown's supporters are more enthusiastic. In fact," the pollster added, "among those who are absolutely certain they will vote, Brown pulls to within two points of Coakley."

On January 7, the Cook Political Report moved the race from its "solid Democratic" column to "leans Democratic"—just one notch away from "toss-up." Remember: This is Massachusetts. The Democrats hold nearly 90 percent of state house seats and all of the congressional delegation; no Republican has won a U.S. Senate seat here since 1972; and Barack Obama carried the state by 26 points.

There are a few reasons why Brown has some hope. First, the national mood has turned against the Democratic party. Sean Trende of Real Clear Politics calculates that if Massachusetts registers a swing equal to the average of the swings in the Virginia and New Jersey electorates between the 2008 presidential contest and the 2009 gubernatorial elections, Coakley will win by a mere 51 percent to 49 percent. Trende does offer a few caveats, though, including that Massachusetts is more liberal than those states, and that Senate races tend to be more partisan than gubernatorial races.

Second, the mood in Massachusetts has turned against the state's top Democrat, Governor Deval Patrick. About six in ten voters disapprove of the job he's doing, and the Republican gubernatorial candidate, Charlie Baker, has outraised Patrick ten-to-one in campaign contributions. Brown is running against the Democrats who control both Washington and Massachusetts.

Coakley herself has a number of vulnerabilities. An uninspiring if competent candidate, she is aiming to run out the clock. She has agreed to a handful of debates only on condition that libertarian candidate Joseph Kennedy (no relation to Teddy) be there to attack Brown from the right. Just one debate will be broadcast on live TV in the state's largest market (on January 11).

Martha Coakley

Rasmussen polls in early January suggested that Brown could conceivably pull off a stunning upset: 'Among those who are absolutely certain they will vote, Brown pulls to within two points of Coakley.'

Coakley has been avoiding the media. When asked by The Weekly Standard following a January 5 radio debate if she thought Governor Patrick was doing a good job, she initially declined to answer and walked away. After huddling with campaign staffers, she reemerged only to say that Patrick is "doing the best that he can under those economic circumstances."

The attorney general's record as a prosecutor also has come under scrutiny. The *Boston Globe* ran a damning story on January 6 on Coakley's lax prosecution of a child rapist in 2005. The rapist (later put away by a different prosecutor) roamed the streets for two years after Coakley failed to recommend that he be held on bail. Asked for comment late Wednesday, Scott Brown said he hadn't read the paper and added that people are free to examine both his and her public actions as lawyers.

Though Brown was unwilling to attack her record, he has offered withering criticism of Coakley's position that terrorists have a constitutional right to trial in civilian court. Enemy combatants "should be transferred to military facilities and interrogated," Brown said during Tuesday's radio debate. Brown and outside groups have also been hammering Coakley's comment that "we need to get taxes up" to reduce the deficit.

Brown, a lieutenant colonel in the National Guard and a onetime Jordache jeans and Marshalls model, could serve as a model for other Republicans running for office in deep blue states. Brown keeps social conservatives on board by saying he would vote for conservative judges like John Roberts, but his central campaign message has broader appeal. "It's taxes. It's out of control spending. It's terrorism," he says. Brown attacks many of Obama's policies, but he avoids criticizing Obama personally. Brown burnishes his bipartisan credentials by pointing out his support for, and Coakley's opposition to, President Obama's surge in Afghanistan.

On health care, Brown campaigns against the "one size fits all" approach of Obamacare and says each state should be able to find its own path to insuring the uninsured. "Seniors should be scared" of the Medicare cuts in the health care legislation, he says. "Why should Massachusetts subsidize what other states have failed to do?"

"What I would suggest is that we go back to the drawing board."

Of course, to start over means first scrapping the current legislation. Perhaps the irony of Massachusetts sending Ted Kennedy's replacement to Washington to kill what Kennedy called "the cause of my life" is just too fantastic to come true. But don't they say that truth is stranger than fiction? ♦

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Blaming Israel First

Business as usual at the U.N.

BY PETER BERKOWITZ

Tel Aviv

With the possible exception of the U.S. armed forces, no military in the history of warfare has made greater efforts in the face of grave national security threats to avoid the use of force or has tried harder, when obliged to fight, to protect noncombatants than the Israel Defense Forces. With the possible exception of the U.S. armed forces, no military has investigated itself as rigorously as the IDF. With the possible exception of the U.S. judiciary, no courts have done more to hold their military accountable than Israel's. And with the possible exception of America, no democracy has gone further in wartime to legitimize dissent than Israel.

It is therefore a bitter irony, fraught with consequences for the legitimacy of international law, that—with the same possible exception—no country's military, judiciary, and democracy have been the target of greater vilification for alleged human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity than Israel's.

The continuing controversy over the Goldstone Report is a case in point.

In April 2009, the Geneva-based U.N. Human Rights Council appointed Richard Goldstone, judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa and former prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, to head a mission

> to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law that might have been committed at any time in the context of the military operations that were conducted in Gaza during the period from 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, whether before, during or after.

Peter Berkowitz is the Tad and Dianne Taube senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

On September 15, the mission released its 575-page report. The bulk was devoted to alleged Israeli misconduct in Operation Cast Lead, which aimed to stop the more than 12,000 rockets and mortars fired over eight years by Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups at civilian targets in southern Israel. The report firmly and in vivid detail accused the Jewish state of human rights violations, war crimes, and "actions" that "might justify a competent court finding that crimes against humanity have been committed." Tentatively and briefly, the report also found that "it may be that the Palestinian combatants did not at all times adequately distinguish themselves from the civilian population" and that Palestinian rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli civilians "would constitute war crimes, and may amount to crimes against humanity."

The document recommended that the Security Council require Israel and Palestinian authorities to report, within six months, on the investigations and prosecutions international law obliged them to carry out. Should Israel fail to make good progress, the report recommended that the Security Council refer the mission's allegations to the prosecutor for the International Criminal Court. The report's recommendations concerning the Palestinian authorities were decidedly more tepid.

On November 3, the U.S. House of Representatives, by a vote of 344-36, passed a nonbinding resolution rejecting the report as "irredeemably biased." Two days later, the U.N. General Assembly, by a vote of 114-18, adopted the report and sent it to the Security Council.

The Security Council has declined to take action. But damage has been done. By pervasively insinuating that Israel is no better than, and in some respects worse than, the terrorists it battles, the Goldstone Report hands Islamic extremists another propaganda victory. Credulous European and American intellectual and political elites have already casually imbibed the opinion that Israel deliberately attacked civilian targets to terrorize Palestinians and destroy the foundations of civilian life in Gaza.

Goldstone's mission was suspect in Israel's eyes from the outset. The Human Rights Council that commissioned it is disreputable. It includes among its 48 members China, Cuba, Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia; notwithstanding the gross violations of human rights of which many of its members are guilty, it has made a priority of condemning Israel. In addition, statements about Operation Cast Lead and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict made before their appointments by two of Goldstone's three mission colleagues—Christine Chinkin, professor of international law at the London School of Economics, and Hina Jilani, advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan—could reasonably be seen as prejudging Israel's guilt. And from the General Assembly's 1975 resolution declaring Zionism a form of racism to the International Court of Justice's 2004 ruling that Israel's security barrier violated international law and must be dismantled, Israel has learned to expect from international bodies hypocrisy, slander, and scorn for its security.

Consequently, the Israeli government's decision not to cooperate with Goldstone, while still controversial in Israel, was understandable. The mission's mammoth report, written in unseemly haste, confirmed Israel's doubts.

A careful reading thoroughly discredits the Goldstone Report. So demonstrated Hebrew University philosophy professor and New York University law professor Moshe Halbertal, a distinguished man of the Israeli left who helped draft the IDF's ethics code, in a devastating *New Republic* critique. Here, three

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examples of the report's biased and unscrupulous analysis must suffice.

■ First, it presents as settled that, despite completely withdrawing from Gaza in 2005, Israel remains under international law an occupying power with attendant obligations because it controls Gaza's borders. In reality, the legal question is very much in dispute. Israel's famously progressive and activist Supreme Court has ruled that the country no longer occupies Gaza. And as Col. (Ret.) Daniel Reisner, former head of the IDF's International Law Department, pointed out to me, even the International Committee of the Red Cross considers the question to be difficult and unresolved.

■ Second, the report blames Israel for causing humanitarian suffering by imposing a blockade on Gaza. In the process it dismisses the heroic efforts the IDF made in the midst of last winter's military operation that *increased* food, medicine, and fuel entering Gaza. Nor does it examine Hamas's theft of these humanitarian supplies or exploitation of Israel's daily humanitarian pauses to launch rockets at civilians in Israel and attack the IDF in Gaza. And the report fails to note that Egypt controls Gaza's western border, imposing restrictions more severe than Israel's—this although the mission itself entered Gaza through the Egyptian-administered Rafah crossing.

■ Third, the report accuses Israel of violating the laws of war by killing more than 200 civilian Palestinian police officers. In so accusing, the report relied heavily on Palestinian testimony and ignored or dismissed openly available information showing that Hamas also assigned the police a military role and ordered them, in the event of a ground operation, to fight the IDF.

More generally, the Goldstone Report suffers from fatal methodological flaws. While subjecting Israeli accounts of wartime operations to hyper-exacting scrutiny and relentless skepticism, it routinely accepts Palestinian testimony of alleged Israel crimes at face value, rarely if ever wondering whether Gazans regarded representations to the mission as acts of resistance. This is of a piece with the report's systematic failure to give due attention, as the laws of armed conflict direct, to military necessity, which in this case means the precautions feasible for reasonable IDF commanders to make in the harsh conditions of urban warfare against an enemy relentlessly striving to blur the distinction between civilians and combatants.

Finally, while the Goldstone Report goes to extravagant and irrelevant lengths to put Israel's Gaza operation in context by discussing the larger sweep of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it barely mentions Hamas and glosses over the terrorism to which it is devoted. To understand Israel's operation, however, it is crucial to grasp Hamas's frequently reiterated determination to wage jihad to destroy Israel. It is also vital to appreciate that Hamas blatantly violates the laws of armed conflict by deliberately transforming Gaza City and other densely populated areas into military bases. From these locations, using its own people as human shields, Hamas launches its rockets and mortars at Israel's civilian population—ensuring that Israeli operations aimed at ending those attacks will make Israel a killer of Palestinian civilians.

No doubt, like all armies, the IDF made errors in Operation Cast Lead. And in the infernal smoke and fire of asymmetric urban warfare its soldiers and officers may have committed crimes. In the short term, Israel's Military Advocate General's Corps continues to investigate allegations and to pursue substantial ones. A military task force established to examine the Goldstone Report's allegations headed by Brigadier General Yuval Halamish expects to publish its findings at the end of January.

The long-term stakes, according to General Halamish, are high: "The fundamental problem applies not just to Israel but to all democratic nations—if they accept the Goldstone Report's approach and conclusions, they will not be able to fight terror." ♦

The End of Multilateralism

Not that it ever really got started.

BY GORDON G. CHANG

Just before Christmas, the U.N. Security Council adopted an arms embargo on Eritrea, which has been supplying weapons to Islamic insurgents in nearby Somalia. In one sense, the strictly worded measure is a symbol of the international community's determination to stop tragic conflicts in the Horn of Africa. The resolution, however, is years late and could end up having little effect. A similar U.N. embargo on Somalia has not prevented weapons from being freely traded in Mogadishu. The concept of global collective security, unfortunately, has not worked well, either last century or this one.

It is no surprise that the United Nations is not meeting important challenges, but even once-successful global institutions are losing effectiveness. The International Monetary Fund, for instance, completely failed to handle—or even anticipate—the global economic downturn. The G-7 and G-8 are now thought to be irrelevant, and the G-20, considered a replacement for these two groupings, has little to show for three grand gatherings in 2008 and

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2009. The World Trade Organization has been unable to prevent a resurgence of protectionism, and its Doha Round negotiations, now more than eight years old, have stalled. These negotiations could be the first major trade talks to fail since the 1930s. Last month's Copenhagen climate change summit, the 15th installment of the once-productive Conference of the Parties talks, flopped even though it was hailed as "the most important meeting in the history of the world." Weak nuclear rogues like Syria are now getting the better of the once-mighty International Atomic Energy Agency. North Korea has already outsmarted the watchdog organization by covertly building plutonium-core weapons, and Iran is developing an atomic warhead with impunity.

President Obama says the United States cannot solve the world's problems alone. Maybe that's true, but sooner or later he has to realize he's not going to get the help of the world's other powers. The "international community" is not coming together to solve common problems.

This is not how we thought things would work out two decades ago. In the early 1990s, optimistic Western analysts predicted that, with the Soviet Union gone, the world would enter a generally harmonious era. As Francis Fukuyama famously argued, events would continue to occur, but "the evolution of human societies through different forms of government had culminated in modern liberal democracy and market-oriented capitalism."

Because democracies did not fight one another, the reasoning went, the international system would become more manageable. Nations would generally tend to agree with one another on the big issues—or at least manage to get along. In this type of world, multilateralism was not only considered possible, it was thought to be necessary and even desirable.

Multilateralism, by its emphasis on consensual action, implicitly delegitimized America's leading role in defending core Western values. So did the concept of globalization. Trade, the theory went, would lead to open economies, open economies to prosperity, prosperity to representative governance, and representative governance to peace. In this extraordinarily benign environment, the impersonal forces of history, relentlessly grinding forward, would finish off Communists, autocrats, and bad actors of all stripes.

As we now know, the opposite occurred. When the political barriers to trade fell, globalization indeed kicked into high gear, creating unprecedented amounts of wealth and liquidity. But global prosperity also strengthened hardline states, notably China and Russia, giving them the means to resist democratization, pursue aggressive foreign policies, and even bend the international system more to their liking. The Chinese, in particular, are displaying a newfound "sense of triumphalism" (as a senior U.S. official put it to the *Washington Post* last week) and are acting as if their economic success means they don't have to listen to anybody. Developing democracies, such as India and Brazil, also gained prominence and a platform to pursue policies that differed from those of the more advanced nations.

The result is a world with many different voices, one where consensus, or even agreement, on important issues is not possible. Simply put, among the 195 nations of the world there is no common view of the troubling events of the day and no accepted approach to handling them.

Even though the conditions that gave rise to multilateralism no longer exist, the concept has not only survived but attained the status almost of a geopolitical religion. In this environment, solutions are legitimate only if they are multilateral. Yet because multilateral solutions are becoming increasingly difficult to reach, problems fester. Most of the time, the best the international community can manage are lowest common denominator fixes on matters marginal to global security. It was thus utterly predictable that the Security Council chose last month to deal with Eritrea instead of, say, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The odds of the U.N. stopping the Iranian nuclear weapons program, which were never high to begin with, are getting vanishingly small. Why? China, which has supplanted Russia as Tehran's primary backer, can veto any Security Council measure aimed at the mullahs. And in mid-October, Premier Wen Jiabao announced that China was going to strengthen its already robust commercial ties with Iran, thereby giving the theocracy additional means to resist international pressure. Last week China firmly blocked a fourth set of U.N. sanctions on Iran, setting back American efforts to rally the international community.

Despite China's siding with Tehran's atomic ayatollahs, the United States has not abandoned efforts to structure a U.N. solution. The prospect of enlisting Beijing, however, remains bleak. There are many reasons for China's obstructionism, but the most important factor complicating ties between the two giants is the worldwide economic downturn.

Last year, the global economy contracted by 2.2 percent according to a U.N. estimate, the first drop since the Second World War. Forecasters expect an uptick this year of 2.4 percent, but it may be temporary. The principal factor creating current growth is government stimulus programs in the world's largest economies. Beijing, for instance, pumped a massive $1.1 trillion into its $4.6 trillion economy last year, and Obama's Washington is employing the same tactic, albeit on a smaller scale.

American and Chinese leaders know that government spending is only a short-term solution. Long-term, both want to export their way out of economic peril, putting them on a collision course. As Fred Bergsten and Arvind Subramanian of the Peterson Institute have noted, Obama's top economic adviser, Larry Summers, has warned China that it "can no longer behave like China because the U.S. intends to behave much more like China." So the generally complementary economic relationship between the two nations is now a thing of the past. And global markets are not big enough for even one China-sized exporter at the moment. Indeed,

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Chinese exports have declined every month since November 2008.

In a deteriorating economic environment, it was almost inevitable that the United States and China would end up bickering; they are now engaged in a series of trade disputes over tires, steel pipe, chicken, automobiles, automobile parts, paper, and nylon, among other items. And there is growing unease in Washington over China's predatory currency practices.

The geopolitical consequence of trade friction is that the Chinese will be even less amenable to helping Washington contain Tehran, especially because Beijing places importance on its economic relations with Iran's theocracy. The possibility of a U.N.-brokered solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis, in other words, is becoming more remote.

The growing troubles between the United States and China are a leading indicator of problems that will become evident elsewhere. World trade appears to have contracted last year by almost 10 percent. If this early estimate is accurate, the falloff would be the largest decline in 80 years. In a period of slumping output and faltering trade, economies around the world will continue to "de-globalize," in other words, to delink from each other. In these circumstances, national leaders will likely see less of a need to cooperate with each other on the great security issues of the day. Contracting trade could become the new motor for geopolitical friction.

Multilateralism, which didn't work in a prosperous period, is even less likely to be effective in the stagnant (or declining) years ahead. The risk is that the pursuit of multilateral solutions will make the world more dangerous because critical time will be squandered pursuing approaches with little or no hope of succeeding. North Korea, for instance, used the time gained during the Beijing-sponsored six-party talks—they began in 2003 and are now stalled—to test its first nuclear device, and it could use additional time to add to its arsenal. Iran is now perfecting its nuclear technology while the Obama administration, held back by China, is unable to craft a solution in the Security Council.

"The only international security system that works is the U.S. alliance system," writes Greg Sheridan. It is ironic—and a bit sad—that it takes an Australian journalist to see what an American president cannot. Multilateralism sounds fine in theory, but in this precarious period it will take strong leadership from Washington, the ultimate guarantor of the international system, to meet challenges. Others understand this. When will we? ♦

A Terrorist Goes Free

Apparently we do negotiate with hostage-takers.

BY BILL ROGGIO

On the evening of January 20, 2007, U.S. soldiers serving in the Provincial Joint Coordination Center in Karbala, Iraq, were attacked by an Iranian-backed terrorist squad. The raid was carried out with precision. At 5 P.M., a convoy of five vehicles made to look just like SUVs used by U.S. contractors entered the Karbala base. The terrorists, estimated at 12 men, opened fire with assault rifles and threw hand grenades. One U.S. soldier was killed in the firefight and four others were captured. The attackers fled the base but were tracked by Iraqi police after they passed through a checkpoint.

With the police in hot pursuit, the kidnappers decided to execute the hostages and abandon their vehicles. Three of the U.S. soldiers were found dead in neighboring Babil; the fourth was wounded and died before he could receive proper treatment.

The U.S. military suspected that the Karbala assault was no average attack. The raid had required specific intelligence, intensive training, and major resources (weapons, vehicles, uniforms, identification papers, radios, etc.). "The precision of the attack, the equipment used and the possible use of explosives to destroy the military vehicles in the compound suggests that the attack was well rehearsed prior to execution," Lieutenant Colonel Scott Bleichwehl, the spokesman for Multinational Division Baghdad, said immediately after the attack. "The attackers went straight to where Americans were located in the provincial government facility, bypassing the Iraqi police in the compound."

The Pentagon also suspected Iran was ultimately responsible for the attack. The Quds Force, Iran's special operations branch which has founded and supported terror groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Islamic Jihad and Hamas in the Palestinian territories, was a natural suspect. The Quds Force's specialty is proxy warfare.

There was a good reason the attack was so meticulously planned. A terrorist named Qais al-Khazali was behind it. A cleric and adviser to Moktada al-Sadr, Khazali ran the Khazali Network, an Iranian-baked radical Shia terror group later known as the Asaib al Haq or the League of the Righteous.

During a raid in Basra in March 2007, U.S. forces captured Khazali, his brother Laith (also a leader of the Khazali Network), and Ali Mussa Daqduq. Daqduq was a senior Hezbollah operative who was tasked

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by Iran to organize Shia terror groups along the same lines as Hezbollah. During a raid in Baghdad in May 2007, U.S. forces killed Azhar al Dulaimi, the tactical commander of the group.

The March raid provided a trove of information on the Shia terror groups and Iran's involvement in the Iraqi insurgency. During a briefing on July 2, 2009, Brigadier General Kevin Bergner, then the spokesman for Multi-National Forces Iraq, described the intelligence gleaned from their capture and confirmed that Iran's Quds Force was behind the 2007 attack.

According to Bergner, a document found during the March raid "showed that the group that attacked the Provincial Joint Coordination Center in Karbala had conducted extensive preparation and drills prior to the attack. Quds Force had developed detailed information regarding our soldiers' activities, shift changes and fences, and this information was shared with the attackers."

Qais's assault team was trained in Iran, and U.S. spy satellites found a mockup of the Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center at the Fajr Garrison—a Quds Force training facility in Ahwaz. Qais and Daqduq admitted to U.S. interrogators that "senior leadership within the Quds Force knew of and supported planning for the eventual Karbala attack" and "authorized the operation." Other documents showed that the Khazali Network was behind many other attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces.

Despite the severity of the attacks and Qais Khazali's known links to Iran's intelligence services, he was nonetheless released from U.S. custody in late December, at the same time that the League of the Righteous released Peter Moore, a British contractor. Moore, along with four of his bodyguards had been kidnapped on May 29, 2007, in another well-planned raid, this time at the finance ministry in Baghdad. Immediately after the kidnapping, the League of the Righteous demanded the release of Qais, Laith, and other members of the group in exchange for their hostages.

The United States eventually buckled under pressure from Britain. The process to free Qais began last summer, when Laith and more than 100 members of the League of the Righteous were released. In exchange, the Shia terror group turned over the remains of three of the bodyguards in their custody. All three had been shot. The fourth bodyguard, who has yet to be released, is also thought to be dead.

The U.S. military has denied that a deal was cut with the Shia terror group to secure the release of the Brits and insists the release of Qais, Laith, and others to the Iraqi government was part of the "reconciliation process." But U.S. military and intelligence officers I have spoken with disagree and say that Qais Khazali's release was indeed part of a bargain to free the British hostages.

Qais Khazali and his ilk do not represent any legitimate Iraqi interests that can be "reconciled" and folded back into society. Their organization represents Iran, and Iran used them to sow chaos and murder and may well do so again.

The deal raises two important questions. First, why would the United States release dangerous terrorists who are directly linked to Iran's Quds Force and who can threaten the recent security gains in Iraq? Military officers from General David Petraeus on down have gone on the record saying that Iran is still active in attempting to destabilize Iraq.

Second, did the Obama administration violate a long-standing executive order, put in place by President Ronald Reagan, that prevents negotiations with hostage takers and terrorists? Senators Jeff Sessions and Jon Kyl put this very question to President Obama in a July 2009 letter after Laith Khazali was released. The administration has yet to respond to Sessions and Kyl. But now we must wonder, once again, if this same executive order has been violated in the case of Qais Khazali.

The Khazali brothers and their terror network are responsible for the deaths of five American soldiers and numerous Iraqis. America deserves to know why they were freed. ♦

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Lamb's Slaughter

Thank you, C-SPAN.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

'America is grateful to Brian Lamb," said President Bush a couple of years ago, when he awarded the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, to the founder and CEO of C-SPAN. The network Lamb founded more than 30 years ago may be the greatest boon to American self-government since the Fifteenth Amendment. But Lamb has other great gifts, notably as an interviewer who with a single, simple, apparently artless question can bring down a guest's most meticulously constructed edifice of baloney.

He did it again on December 30, when he addressed a letter to congressional leaders noting that they had "all talked about the value of transparent discussions on reforming the health care system." He therefore asked—politely, always politely—that they open the final negotiations of the bill to broadcast. One question, and the walls of baloney came tumbling down.

When Lamb's letter became public a week later, a spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid responded with a lightning strike into irrelevance: "What should truly concern the American people is the Republicans' shamelessly transparent strategy to stop reform at all costs by relying on misinformation and myths. Their ploys are broadcast on C-SPAN for all of America to see." (As the callers always say, Thanks for C-SPAN!)

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs's bumbling attempts at evasion played like a tape loop on YouTube, as did a brilliantly produced compilation of clips showing the repeated pledges of Senator Obama that President Obama would insist all "these [health care] negotiations [be broadcast] on C-SPAN so that the American people can see what the choices are."

Asked about the president's campaign promise and Lamb's letter, Speaker Nancy Pelosi weirdly said, "There are a number of things he was for on the campaign trail." Then she moved effortlessly from regal disdain to vainglorious prevarication: "There has never been a more open process for any legislation."

Asked about the president's campaign promise, Speaker Nancy Pelosi weirdly said, 'There are a number of things he was for on the campaign trail.' Then she moved effortlessly from regal disdain to vainglorious prevarication.

For their part, Republicans recoiled with disgust at the thought that politicians could be so insincere. But it was hard to miss the uncanny resemblance between the Democratic stratagems in health care reform and those employed by Republicans when they were in the majority, though usually in pursuit of much more trivial prizes—those thousands of earmarks slipped into unrelated bills over the last 15 years, just for starters.

But House Minority Leader John Boehner was undeterred. Citing the Democrats' "troubling track record of jamming through massive bills that have not been properly scrutinized," Boehner brandished his "congressional transparency initiative" as the antidote to all these sinister manipulations.

Two things were instantly clear about Boehner's initiative. First, its reforms would indeed require the Democratic leadership to open their negotiations to the public. And second, its reforms would be fastidiously ignored when Republicans regain control of Congress.

Best of all among the many reactions to Lamb's simple request was the scrambling of Obama lickspittles in the hackocracy. Some of these independent-minded champions of transparency and open government—E.J. Dionne, Joe Klein, Jonathan Alter—fell gracefully silent. Others justified the closed reconciliation proceedings of their Democratic masters with a disingenuousness that can only be called transparent.

"At first glance," said a contributor to the Democratic blog Think Progress, "Lamb's request sounds reasonable, even righteous." But—the buttboys are known for their big buts—"But if one actually considers the tone and tenor of the televised health care debate of 2009, filming the conference negotiations seems counterproductive."

His point was echoed by many other apologists, but none exposed the logic of the Democratic position with such insouciant clarity. This is what Reid's flack was driving at, and Pelosi too. All those "Republican ploys" were "broadcast on C-SPAN for all to see"—and the transparency didn't work! Instead the public fell for the ploys and turned against health care reform and its Democratic sponsors. The hearings, the briefings, the speeches—all that patient explaining. . . . Nothing but wasted breath. So the hell with transparency. It's time for Plan B.

What a spectacle—a three-ring circus of political cant—all set loose for our enjoyment in response to a simple, seemingly innocent request. My, what big questions you ask, Mr. Lamb! Has there ever been a more elegant bomb-thrower than the founder of C-SPAN, a more relentless mutineer, a populist at once so quiet, so sane, and so subversive? No wonder America is grateful. ♦

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Unhappy New Year ... for Democrats

The 2010 election cycle looks very different from the last two

By Fred Barnes

The good news for Republicans in 2010 is they're ahead in 6 races for Senate seats now held by Democrats and lead or are tied in 6 open seats where Republicans are retiring. In the House, Republicans figure to win a minimum of 20 seats, as things now stand. They're a good bet to have a majority of the nation's governors after the midterm elections in November. The bad news? There is no bad news.

Okay, the stream of good news is occasionally interrupted. In Connecticut, Democratic senator Chris Dodd, of Countrywide sweetheart mortgage fame, is retiring rather than face likely defeat in November. The new Democratic candidate, state attorney general Richard Blumenthal, will be tougher (but hardly impossible) to beat. In several states—Washington and Oregon come to mind—Republicans haven't come up with strong Senate candidates yet. And a few more Democratic retirements are probably needed for Republicans to gain 40 seats and capture the House.

But Republican shortcomings are mostly correctable. The problems facing Democrats are mostly not. There's no way, for example, to turn Deval Patrick, the ineffectual and unpopular governor of Massachusetts, into an attractive candidate for reelection. His Republican opponent, Charles Baker, raised twice as much money in six months as Patrick did in all of 2009.

Nationwide, the Republican trend is picking up speed. Charles Cook, the election guru, issued his 25 "latest ratings changes" last week. All but two took note of improved Republican prospects in congressional races. In polling by Scott Rasmussen, Republicans widened their lead in the generic ballot to a 9-point preference for Republican House candidates. Meanwhile, the Democratic "brand," as measured by Gallup, continues to fray.

Democrats find consolation in their lead—49 percent to 41 percent in Gallup—in party identification, though their number just dropped below 50 percent for the first time since 2005. They've also persuaded themselves that 2010 won't replicate 1994, when Republicans gained 52 House and 8 Senate seats and took control of Congress. This time, Democratic majorities remain "safe," as *Politico* put it.

I don't think so. A few months ago, the consensus in the political community was that Democrats would gain Senate seats, bolstering their current 60-vote majority. Now the consensus is Republicans will pick up 3 to 5 seats. That would put Republicans in a position to take control in 2012, when 24 Democratic but only 9 Republican seats will be at stake.

In 2010, the Democratic seats in jeopardy—those with Republican candidates leading in polls—include Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid's in Nevada. Reid has already spent $1 million on TV ads in a state with only two media markets. But he trails both Republican contenders, state Republican chairwoman Sue Lowden and Danny Tarkanian, the son of famed basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian, by 6 points in the latest Rasmussen poll—that is, outside the margin of error.

In Colorado, Democrat Michael Bennett, appointed to his Senate seat, is running behind Republican Jane Norton, a former lieutenant governor. He says he's for Obamacare, opposed by most Coloradoans, even if it means losing the election. It might. After years of decline, Colorado Republicans are resurgent. Bennett has a formidable primary foe, former state house speaker Andrew Romanoff.

Arkansas is a hotbed of anger against Obamacare. Yet Democratic senator Blanche Lincoln voted for it. Four Republicans are seeking the Republican Senate nomination. She trails all four.

In Delaware, Republicans have their best possible candidate in moderate congressman Mike Castle for the seat vacated by Vice President Biden. Castle leads all potential Democratic opponents, including Biden's son Beau, the state attorney general.

Pennsylvania looked hopeless after Senator Arlen Specter switched parties and became a Democrat. No more. Specter has a tough primary struggle against Democratic

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representative Joe Sestak. Republican Pat Toomey has surged ahead of both of them. With Democrat Byron Dorgan quitting, North Dakota is all but certain to elect a Republican senator, as it should have years ago. In Illinois, Republican congressman Mark Kirk is running even in the race for President Obama's old Senate seat.

The six open Republican seats are the flip side of the Democratic ones: Once highly vulnerable, they are growing safer. Florida, in fact, is a near-cinch to go Republican, whether Governor Charles Crist or ex-house speaker Marco Rubio wins the primary. Kansas is similar. The Republican nominee, whoever it is, undoubtedly will win the seat of Sam Brownback, who is a prohibitive favorite to be elected governor.

In New Hampshire, former state attorney general Kelly Ayotte not only leads in the Senate race, but Republicans have a solid chance to win one or both of the state's House seats. In Ohio, where a Republican revival is in full swing, Rob Portman, a former House member and the budget chief in the George W. Bush administration, leads two potential Democratic opponents.

Kentucky is a special case. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell feared Jim Bunning, his fellow Kentuckian, could not win a third Senate term and forced him to retire. Polls put two Republicans, secretary of state Trey Grayson and eye surgeon Rand Paul (Ron's son), ahead of any conceivable Democratic candidates.

Missouri, where Republican Kit Bond is retiring, is unique in a different way. Roy Blunt, the ex-House Republican whip, and Democrat Robin Carnahan, the Missouri secretary of state, are household names. Blunt spent eight years as secretary of state, and his son Matt was governor from 2005 to 2009. Carnahan's father was governor, mother a U.S. senator, and brother a current House member. Blunt and Carnahan are in a statistical dead heat.

Like Ohio, Missouri is a bellwether state, though Obama narrowly lost it last year. The Republican trend, especially if it continues to accelerate, is bound to aid Blunt. "Nothing has been as helpful as the Washington Democrats' agenda," he says wryly. "The credit goes to Nancy Pelosi and Barack Obama, and I believe Harry Reid may have joined them and deserve credit."

Kevin McCarthy of California, the House Republican deputy whip, has a method for figuring what Republicans need to win 40 seats. It's based on the percentage of Democrats who lost in 1994 after voting for one or both of two issues, taxes and guns, and applying those percentages to calculate how many might lose in 2010 after voting for two other issues, Obamacare and cap and trade. The answer: not enough.

When those losers are added to the expected gains from open House seats, the number of pickups comes to only 29. That might be sufficient to deny Democrats an operating majority in the House, but they'd still have nominal control.

McCarthy's conclusion is that more Democratic retirements, thus more open seats, are required. In 1994, Republicans won 70 percent of open seats. With a mere 11 open Democratic seats, even that success rate wouldn't produce a Republican majority.

So McCarthy, as the chief recruiter of Republican candidates for the House, has been lining up challengers to veteran Democrats who might be nudged into retirement rather than face tough reelection battles. His targets include committee chairmen like Dave Obey of Wisconsin, John Spratt of South Carolina, Ike Skelton of Missouri, John Murtha of Pennsylvania, and Collin Peterson of Minnesota.

If they don't retire, they might be ousted in a wave election, like 1994, in which Democrats are defeated across the board. The 49 Democrats in districts carried by John McCain in 2008 or in districts rated by Cook with even a slight Republican tilt—they'll all be vulnerable if a wave develops.

Republicans have come close to lining up what McCarthy calls "top tier" candidates in every district that might conceivably elect a Republican. Among these: the Chicago district once held by Rahm Emanuel, Obama's White House chief of staff. McCarthy told the *Washington Post*:

> You get enough people on their surfboards, you send them in the right direction and see how many can get to shore. If the wave is big enough, we get there. But if you don't have them out there and you see the wave coming, it takes too long to paddle and try to turn around and catch it, so you gotta be prepared.

Republicans are prepared. "We've played nothing but defense for two cycles [2006 and 2008]," McCarthy says. Now they're ready to play offense. The only drawback is money, a correctable shortcoming. "At the end of the day, we don't need as much money as the Democrats to win the majority," McCarthy told *Politico*.

Money is no problem for the Republican Governors Association. It has $25 million on hand even after spending lavishly to elect governors in Virginia and New Jersey last November. Democrats have 26 governors, Republicans 24, and Republicans have the modest goal of gaining a majority of governorships.

That should be easy. What's significant is that Republicans have impressive candidates in several major states with Democratic governors: Baker in Massachusetts, state attorney general Tom Corbett in Pennsylvania, former House member Scott McInnis in Colorado, Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker in Wisconsin, ex-senator Norm Coleman in Minnesota (assuming he runs). And they

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have reasonable prospects, given the Republican trend, in California, Michigan, and Illinois.

For 2010, the telltale state is Ohio. It went for Obama in 2008, but his approval there fell below the national average late last year. Ohio has a lousy economy (10.6 percent unemployment), a weak Democratic governor with budget and tax problems (Ted Strickland), and two powerhouse Republican candidates in statewide races (ex-congressman John Kasich for governor, Portman for Senate).

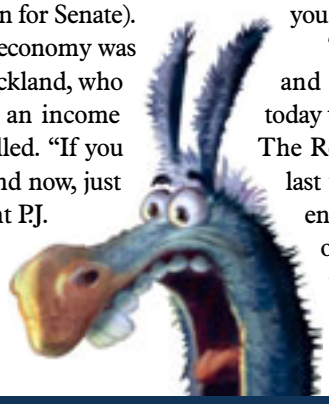
Ohio is ahead of the national curve. Its economy was sour before the recession hit. Efforts by Strickland, who is seeking reelection, haven't helped. And an income tax cut scheduled for April has been cancelled. "If you think the poll numbers are bad for Strickland now, just wait until April," says Republican consultant P.J. Wenzel. "It'll be brutal."

Ohio voters are desperate for anything that might create jobs and income. Four times they had rejected referendums to allow gambling in the state. Last fall, they voted in favor of casinos in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Toledo, 53 percent to 47 percent.

Republicans in Ohio are experiencing role reversal. Steve Stivers is running for the House this year after losing narrowly in 2008. "I feel the momentum this time going my way as opposed to fighting against the current," he told me. "I don't think there's any reason to be defensive in 2010."

In 2008, when he talked about issues like the national debt, "people's eyes kind of glazed over." Democrats ran a TV ad with his picture and his mouth moving but President Bush's voice coming out with cheerful platitudes about the economy. A Bruce Springsteen (pro-Obama) concert was held across the street from a facility where people could register and vote immediately. Thousands did, particularly students at Ohio State. Stivers figures most voted for the Democrat who beat him, Mary Jo Kilroy.

Like Stivers in Columbus, former Republican congressman Steve Chabot in Cincinnati is running against the Democrat who defeated him in 2008, Steve Driehaus. Given the advantages Republicans have this year, both have excellent shots at winning. So do Portman and Kasich. My guess is all four will be elected. Two reasons. One is Republicans have a powerful edge in 2010 on issues and turnout. The other is the Republican trend is likely to hold at least through the November election and perhaps longer.



Will the Republican revival really continue? It should. The economy won't break into a robust rebound any time soon. And Obama can't change course now and alienate his liberal base.

It's clear from every poll and survey over the past six months that a majority of voters has turned sharply against the agenda of Democrats and Obama. It's not what most voters expected, not what they wanted, and far too liberal for a center-right electorate.

As pollster Scott Rasmussen points out, the electorate in 2010 will bear a resemblance to voters over 40 years old in 2008, a majority of whom went for McCain. "Older voters are more likely to show up at a midterm election than younger voters," Rasmussen said.

There's also the enthusiasm factor. Republicans and conservatives are more excited about politics today than Democrats and liberals. That affects turnout. The Republican victories in Virginia and New Jersey last year "show that the turnout model will be different from 2008," according to Rasmussen. It will not only be older and whiter, but also more conservative and more inclined to vote for Republicans.

But will the Republican revival really continue? It should. The economy, with unemployment stuck at 10 percent, won't break into a robust rebound any time soon. And Obama can't change course and alienate his liberal base before the first midterm election of his presidency. After the election maybe, if Democrats suffer landslide losses, but not before.

The important thing about the Republican recovery is that it didn't occur overnight and may be more durable than Democrats and the media expect. It came in two stages. The first began last February, after congressional Republicans voted overwhelmingly against the economic stimulus created by Democrats. That rallied the Republican base and helped spur the Tea Party movement.

The second and more important stage came last summer when Congress took up health care. The trillion dollar cost of Obamacare, plus other spending plans, terrified independents. That inspired a full-scale migration of independents away from Obama and Democrats. Since then, Republicans have led in voter preference for congressional candidates by increasing margins.

Democrats are flummoxed. Their counterattack consists of tying Republicans to George W. Bush. "That's the mistake made by the British Empire," an Ohio Republican told me. "They're fighting the next war like they fought the last one." In 2006 and 2008, the Bush tactic worked. In 2010 it won't. And the Republican recovery rolls on. ♦

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Saving Capitalism . . .

from the capitalists

By Irwin M. Stelzer

We have met the enemy and he is us. So Pogo might have described the situation that the business community has created for itself. There is no question that the Obama administration, and even more the Democratic leadership in Congress, harbor something between skepticism and hostility towards free markets. They believe they can do a better job of allocating the nation's resources than can millions of consumers signaling their preferences to millions of producers by setting the cash registers ringing. That's one reason—indebtedness to trade unions is another—Obama and the Democrats bailed out a manufacturer of cars no one wanted to buy.

But the wave of regulations that characterized the latter part of the Bush administration and the first year of the Obama administration has as much to do with the behavior of the business community, or at least some of its most prominent members, as with the ideological bent of our political masters. Start with George W. Bush—no antibusiness ideologue he—and the much railed-against Sarbanes-Oxley Act.

No matter what one might think of that attempt to solve the problems of corporate book-fiddling, there is no denying that this 2002 statute is a regulatory burden that the business community brought on itself. Company directors, supposed to be independent of the executives they are charged with supervising, simply did not do their jobs. They approved mergers that drove down the price of the acquiring companies' stock, harming the interests of the owners; acquiesced in estimates of "savings" that had no chance of being realized; allowed stock options to be re-priced and re-dated so that executives who had not met performance standards nevertheless received the same rewards for failure that they would have received for success; and made certain that "their" executives were never paid less than some average concocted by fee-seeking compensation consultants. Little wonder that Congress and President Bush felt it necessary to pass a law that attempted to make certain that directors are indeed independent of the CEO, that no one is cooking the books, and that compensation committees feel at least some pressure to behave as guardians of shareholders' interests. No surprise that under the new accounting oversight rules the cost of doing business has gone up, and that an excessive aversion to risk-taking might well have been introduced into boardroom deliberations. These costs, which may or may not exceed the benefits of the new regulations, are in the nature of self-inflicted wounds.

Looking ahead, we have the provisions of the health care "reform" act that in effect turns insurance companies into public utilities. Like electric utilities that cannot deny service to anyone requesting it, or cut off customers who do not pay bills without going through elaborate procedures, health insurance companies will have to serve virtually all comers—and at rates for the sick and elderly that cannot deviate from some specified average by more than a statutory-fixed multiple. Actuaries out, politicians in.

The insurers will also have to limit their profits to some stated percentage of their premium charges—utility monopolies have long been subject to such limitations on what they are permitted to earn. Yes, an antibusiness Congress was waiting for an opportunity to get its hands around the throat of an industry that it deems provides a necessary service and has monopoly power—the two broad criteria for utility status.

The insurance industry's monopoly power does not arise from any natural cause, though, such as the enormous cost of constructing competing electricity transmission lines, or of tearing up the streets of a major city to allow competing gas distribution companies. No, such monopoly power as insurance companies have was created by laws it lobbied for and got—exemption from the antitrust laws, and limitations on competition across state lines. The way the industry saw it, unregulated monopoly power is best, but if that game is up, regulation is to be preferred to competition. Which is why the industry fought to retain its exemption from the antitrust laws—and, to its relief, won.

It prefers the status of regulated monopoly to that of unregulated competitor because it knows the latter makes for sleepless nights, years in which individual company performance might be so poor as to cause heads to roll in the executive suite, and continuing pressure to innovate and lower costs. Regulated status, on the other hand, turns the

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focus of executive effort from the hurly-burly competitive marketplace to the more congenial, sedate hearing rooms of the state regulatory agencies that are being charged with enforcing the profit limits. It also confers a significant advantage on big companies, and not only because they can comfortably bear the costs of coping with the regulatory process. Small competitors, providing a service that their customers find satisfactory, will find it difficult to keep administrative costs to the percentage of premiums specified in the legislation. Human-scale boutiques out; instead dial 1 for English, wait for customer service, and if you don't know your account number, well, that's your problem.

Regulation creates an unequal battle between the law departments and political lobbyists of the insurance companies, and the staffs of the regulatory agencies, even those that are not captured by the companies they are supposed to regulate. In the end, only the bravest regulator will accept responsibility for causing an insurance company to fail by denying it the premiums it says it needs.

The companies know, too, that the health care bill's restriction on the portion of their incomes they may devote to executive salaries and other administrative costs is not the draconian measure it might seem. For one thing, the definitions of expenses, profits, and the other bookkeeping arcana will be the subject of discussion with the regulators, discussions in which there will be what economists call asymmetric information—the companies know a lot more than the regulator, with limited staff, can ever know.

Politicians pounce when business practices offend commonsense notions of what is fair and when incomes are not broadly related to performance.

More important, settled law provides that any regulated entity is allowed to earn on its investment what companies exposed to similar risks do in fact earn on their investment. "That return, moreover, should be sufficient to assure confidence in the financial integrity of the enterprise, so as to maintain its credit and to attract capital," the Supreme Court noted in a 1944 decision that stands unchallenged. Not a bad prospect for an insurance company, especially as compared with the risks lurking in a competitive marketplace.

It should be obvious that the process of discovering the right number for allowed profit will depend on the selection of comparable companies, the number of years selected as the relevant test period, the theoretical models to be used in these computations, and other stuff that fills thousands of pages of utility proceedings and provides testifying fees for accountants, rating agency staff, and economists (not excluding this writer). The acknowledged dean of regulatory economists, Cornell professor emeritus Alfred E. Kahn, notes in his authoritative two-volume study that "the very *idea* of the 'correct' rate is elusive," and Roger Morin, a Georgia State University professor who specializes in this field, writes, "there are no hard-and-fast rules, no mathematical formula or scientific panacea that can be mechanically and infallibly applied."

There is, of course, the possibility that some small-minded regulators will occasionally deny a company what its executives and counsel deem a fair return on its investment. In that event, the battle will move to the courts. More costs, more fees. A small price to pay to avoid the greater evil—competition.

But this process leaves the executives with market shares largely intact, jobs secure, and little need to innovate since there are no competitors to contend with and even the best regulators have no ability to create a Schumpeterian wave of creative destruction. Doubt that, and compare the innovations in the telecommunications industry since competition was introduced by a combination of deregulation and antitrust action. Try to recall when you needed permission from AT&T, protected by its regulators, to attach to its system what was called a "foreign device"—in my case a shoulder rest on a telephone hand set, an answering machine, and what was then called a "designer phone" rather than the black instrument, then the only one provided by Western Electric, the AT&T-owned monopoly equipment supplier. Compare that with the plethora of devices and networks now available.

If you still doubt that Pogo had it right, consider the problem of bankers' pay and bonuses, huge sums for doing what the boss of Goldman Sachs calls "God's work"—his refutation of the biblical notion that it is impossible to serve both God and Mammon. Nothing offends bankers and their conservative allies more than the fact that a "pay czar," with implicit powers that far exceed his formal remit, sits in judgment of their estimates of what they should be paid.

Especially now that the major banks, having been bailed out by the taxpayer, have paid back their TARP loans. Leave aside for the moment that bank profits are inflated by the banks' ability to borrow from the Fed at close to zero interest rates, and use the funds to buy Treasury IOUs yielding a safe return on the order of 3 percent. And that investment banks, those financial innovators and steely-nerved traders, have chosen to seek shelter by getting expedited permission from the government to redefine

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themselves as "commercial banks," with special access to the Fed should they get into trouble. Or that some of their debt is still guaranteed by the Treasury. Or that they know they are now considered either too big, or too interconnected to fail—or both. Not exactly the sort of daring risk-takers that they represent themselves to be.

Concentrate instead on the business practices that set the tone in which the debate about bankers' compensation occurs. These institutions, or at least some of them, think nothing of creating products to sell to their clients, while simultaneously selling those same products short for their own accounts so that they can profit from the expected fall in the value of the securities they are urging their customers to buy. A headline in the *New York Times* summarized the practice, "Banks Bundled Debt, Bet Against It and Won." The banks contend that there is nothing improper about this procedure. Perhaps, but the word *wrong* comes to mind. And to the extent that it is practices such as these that contribute to profits, and hence to bonuses, executives have little reason to be surprised when politicians are put under pressure, or in some cases seize a long-awaited opportunity, to do something. (That "something" often turns out to be the wrong thing, is a matter for another day.)

Finally, consider the airlines, products of the innovative skills of the Wright Brothers and, ever since, the indulgence of the bankruptcy courts. These paragons of customer service somehow couldn't solve the problem of providing food, water, and clean toilets to passengers stranded for hours on the tarmac on some 1,500 flights over the past 12 months that had what are called taxi-out times in excess of three hours—a tiny fraction of all flights, but this is the sort of thing where anecdote trumps data.

Delays happen, as every experienced traveler knows. But they also know that there is something wrong with a system that incarcerates them in a smelly aircraft only yards from a terminal, and with airline executives who cannot figure out how to parole them. Part of the reason is the lack of competitive necessity to do so, as many routes are dominated by one or a few carriers. Part of the reason is management sloth, or in the case of those who do "care," sheer incompetence. And perhaps the greater contributor to these delays—Congress's refusal to fund an updating of our obsolete traffic control system, or better still allow its privatization—is not immediately apparent to angry passengers.

So we now have fines of $27,500 per passenger to be levied against airlines that imprison travelers for more than three hours on the tarmac. Any money collected will go to the U.S. Treasury and not to compensate the passengers who suffered the pain of the wait. Such is the government's sense of equity.

The industry claims that the forced return to the gate of delayed flights, or surrender of places in the takeoff queue in anticipation of possible runway delays, will result in more cancellations, creating even more inconvenience for passengers. Perhaps. But the carriers have little support for their antiregulation position: Abused customers do not make a natural constituency for private-sector companies arguing against regulatory intervention.

More examples could be marshaled, but they seem unnecessary to prove that Pogo had it right. True, much of the regulation that is being loaded unto American businesses is costly. But equally true, some or much of it could have been avoided if business leaders had not sought relief from the rigors of competition, had understood that politicians will pounce if business practices offend commonsense notions of what is fair and proper, and if incomes, especially high ones, are not broadly related to performance and do not provide incentives against behavior that creates systemic risk.

The policy question to be answered is not whether we should be suspicious of government efforts to supersede market forces. Or whether we should point out the economic costs of regulation. Of course we should. That's the easy part. The harder question is to decide whether market capitalism is more likely to retain broad support:

- if directors are left free to cater to the executives they are supposed to be supervising, or are pushed in the direction of more fully representing the interests of the owners of the business, the shareholders;
- if insurance companies, just given a gift of 30 million healthy customers who must buy their products, are left free from both competitive and regulatory pressures to set premiums and decide just how much to require insureds to contribute to the profit pot, or have their profits and practices subject to regulatory review;
- if an airline, knowing that all other carriers will act with the same disregard for customer comfort and safety, is permitted to leave passengers on the tarmac for hours on end, without fear of penalty, or is fined to provide an incentive to more kindly behavior;
- if bankers, surviving by the grace of the taxpayer, are free to put bonuses before the shoring up of their capital base, or if some sort of restraint is imposed on their freedom of action, be it by statute or nomination to a Hall of Shame.

It is no good to say that there will be unintended consequences of any move by government to intervene. There surely will—just as there will be unintended consequences of doing nothing to correct abuses that are beyond the ability of markets to correct. My fear is that the latter might just be more damaging to the ability of market capitalism to survive than the former. ♦

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Getting to Know You

The U.S. military maps the human terrain of Afghanistan

A Female Engagement Team with the principal of a school for girls in southern Nangarhar Province.

By Claudia Anderson

Omaha, Nebraska

In early 2003, a single American diplomat and more than 5,000 American troops were stationed in Kandahar, the second city of Afghanistan and the heart of former Taliban country. The troops mostly stayed on their base, penned off near the airport, isolated from the people of the city. One of the few American civilians then living in Kandahar, the former NPR reporter Sarah Chayes, would describe the tedious hours-long delays and "bewildering lack of system" that governed access to the base. Isolation reinforced ignorance, and under the Americans' noses, the provincial governor, a former warlord named Gul Agha Shirzai, exploited his position to snag most U.S. contracts for his Barakzai tribe and to cover his private militia—issued American camouflage uniforms—with impunity for misdeeds from drug smuggling to stealing.

As a result, wrote Chayes in her 2006 book *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan after the Taliban*, "much of the [U.S.] expenditure in effort and treasure that was aimed at building bridges and gaining friends in Kandahar did the reverse. It built a growing feeling of resentment against the U.S. troops."

In those early days, the U.S. military in Afghanistan, for all its famous night-vision goggles, was blind to what has become known as the "human terrain"—the people it had come to liberate. No one has to explain to any soldier the tactical significance of a hill or a river or an airfield; whereas few soldiers on the Kandahar base had ever heard of Barakzais, much less the Popalzais and Alokozais and Ghiljais who had been left out in the cold. Their commanders similarly failed to recognize the mischief flowing every day from the fact that the interpreters on whom the Americans were wholly dependent—supplied

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by the governor's helpful brother—were working for him.

Today efforts are being made to change that, as the military draws on a culture of "lessons learned"—the systematic practice of looking back at mistakes to see what can be done better. The generals in charge of the counterinsurgency strategy being implemented in Afghanistan are graduates of the hard school of Iraq, where the United States also paid the price of ignorance. Now, the generals—notably U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) chief David Petraeus and the commander of coalition forces in Afghanistan, Stanley McChrystal—are working through multiple channels to build their forces' ability to relate to the Afghan population.

The whole thrust of counterinsurgency doctrine is summed up in the subhead to the "Guidance" McChrystal issued to the troops in August: "*Protecting the people is the mission*." There is abundant evidence that commanders are reorienting the coalition effort to this end.

One small but telling sign is Sarah Chayes's own career. After entering Afghanistan just behind U.S. forces in late 2001, she reported from Kandahar for several months. Her previous experience covering the aftermath of war in the Balkans enriched her perspective; so did her decision not to join the foreign media at the international hotel but to live in an Afghan family compound and adopt local dress. By the time she left Kandahar, in the heady atmosphere of the months after the fall of the Taliban, she had decided to give up her job and contribute to the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

The program aims to recruit smart, cool-headed, highly adaptable, mature self-starters who already have a lot of relevant experience.

She did so first through a group founded by Hamid Karzai's older brother, Afghans for Civil Society. She raised money in her native Massachusetts to rebuild houses and a mosque destroyed by a U.S. bomb. She personally directed the work, learning firsthand what it was like to try to get something done under the thumb of Kandahar's "arbitrary, predatory, brutal, if charismatic" governor. After taking a break to write her book, she founded Arghand, a cooperative that employs Kandaharis making scented soaps and lotions for export. All the while, she was deepening her local contacts—and gradually becoming an informal adviser to the U.S. military. Soon they were flying her to Hawaii to brief soldiers about to deploy to Kandahar, and to Fort Leavenworth as a guest speaker. ("She's like no journalist you've ever seen," gushed one who heard her. "She's a hawk!") Today she is a special adviser to General McChrystal. Her eight-page "Comprehensive Action Plan for Afghanistan"—published last January and available at sarahchayes.net—begins: "The United States should redefine its objectives in favor of the Afghan *people*, not the Afghan government."

Another indication of the U.S. military's determination to improve its knowledge of our Afghan friends is General Petraeus's creation of an intelligence unit at CENTCOM that will train military officers, agents, and analysts who commit themselves to Afghanistan and Pakistan work for at least five years. Their training will emphasize cultural and language immersion. To lead the new Center for Afghanistan Pakistan Excellence, Petraeus chose Derek Harvey, a retired colonel working in the Defense Intelligence Agency who had gained a reputation for prescience in his work on Iraq. A longtime reporter recently called Harvey "the most intelligent man" he had dealt with in the U.S. government.

In the same spirit, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, established the Af-Pak Hands last fall. The purpose, again, is to build regional expertise by having a core of some 300 officers specialize in a single area and type of work. Whether they are stationed in the United States or deployed "downrange," they can maintain relationships and steadily deepen their knowledge of the relevant languages, players, and problems.

But no innovation better captures the military's will to shed its blinders about local populations than the aptly named Human Terrain Teams (HTTs). Embedded with units in the field, these teams consist of five to nine civilians with, among them, considerable military or intelligence experience, social-science expertise, analytical skill, and cross-cultural training. Ideally, each team includes at least one Afghan-American, one or more women, and a Ph.D.-level social scientist. Their mission is to "fill the sociocultural knowledge gap" in ways that are valuable to the soldiers they advise. They are specially charged with helping devise nonlethal approaches to improving security in a given place. These are not civil affairs units, off building schools and digging wells, but eyes and ears for the military officers who plan and lead operations.

HTTs are to learn all they can about the people among whom their units operate—their tribal background and power structures and livelihood, their recent experiences with local government and with Kabul, their contacts with the Taliban and warlords and coalition forces, and any matters of special concern to the commander. They are to do this by developing personal relationships in the surrounding communities and systematically interviewing Afghans. As they go, they are to analyze their findings and then package them in forms digestible by soldiers.

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HTT members receive four to six months' training before they deploy. Most of this happens at Fort Leavenworth. But for three weeks they attend a cultural immersion seminar at this country's only Center for Afghanistan Studies, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I visited for a couple of days this fall to observe their training.

The first thing that struck me on taking my seat at the back of a crowded classroom on the Omaha campus was the amount of gray hair. The median age of the 30 or so HTT students must have been 40. The teacher, Thomas Gouttierre, qualified for some gray himself having been dean of international studies at Omaha and director of the Center for Afghanistan Studies since 1974. Before that, he and his wife lived for a decade in Afghanistan, during the hopeful years when a liberal constitution was adopted and women were among those elected to parliament. The Gouttierres went to Kabul as Peace Corps volunteers and stayed on with Tom as a Fulbright fellow and later executive director of the Fulbright Foundation. All through, he also coached the Afghan National Basketball Team.

For three hours that morning, Gouttierre unspooled a panorama of 2,500 years of Afghan history and culture, punctuated with slides of art, historic buildings, and dramatic landscapes as well as with comments on the recent election, a digression on the Pashtun honor code, examples of Afghan humor, and lessons distilled from his center's extensive work with Afghans over 35 years. This made for a somewhat kaleidoscopic experience. Just as the founder of the Mughal empire, Babur, was coming into focus and one was making a mental note to delve into his autobiography beginning, "In the province of Fergana, in the year 1494, when I was twelve years old, I became king," suddenly the Kajaki Dam was center stage.

A medical officer talks to students about hygiene.

After World War II, Gouttierre said, the Afghans had accumulated hard currency from the sale of lamb skins and carpets and wanted to build a dam to irrigate and provide electricity for the Helmand Valley. When they ran short of funds they sought U.S. help. The Morrison-Knudsen Company of Boise, Idaho, which had worked on the Hoover Dam, trained Afghans in the necessary construction skills. Many had never before worked off the farm. The result was not only a dam, but also a cadre of skilled labor that included in addition to the building trades, plumbers and drivers and mechanics, cooks and housekeepers. These workers moved to the cities when the project was done and contributed to the glacially advancing modernization of the Afghan economy. Gouttierre contrasted the wisdom of training Afghans with the wastefulness of importing foreign labor—as the coalition did in its early days to build the all-important Ring Road. For that matter, there are still 30,000 foreign laborers in the country, he said.

Here a class member spoke up. A veteran of several years in Afghanistan assisting civilian development efforts, the student offered a clarification—there is now a requirement to use Afghan labor on most road projects and train them in road maintenance—adding that it took field workers "a year of briefings" and much badgering and cajoling to persuade the U.S. authorities (the student named Karl Eikenberry, then a general serving in Afghanistan, now U.S. ambassador in Kabul) to agree to use local labor. Class members tapped at their laptops.

That afternoon the students disappeared into language labs for their several hours' daily instruction in Dari, the lingua franca of Afghanistan, and Pashto, spoken in the south and east. Their teachers, all native speakers, included some who have been with the Center for Afghanistan Studies since they fled the Soviet invasion, but also a young Fulbright scholar fresh from Kabul. I spent the afternoon talking with Gouttierre in his office, and with Major Robert Holbert, training coordinator for the Human Terrain Teams.

The question on my mind was, How can you manufacture regional experts in six months?

The answer was, You can't—and the program doesn't pretend to. Instead, it aims to recruit smart, creative, cool-headed, highly adaptable, mature self-starters who already have significant relevant experience, and then further equip them to operate as bridges between the U.S. military and

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Afghan people. You can't teach team members enough Dari or Pashto to make them fluent, for instance, but you can teach them enough to build on, and enough to improve their effectiveness at working through interpreters. You can't give them deep knowledge of the places where they'll serve, but you can expose them to a great deal of pertinent information and then teach them how to ask questions—not "What do you think of the provincial government?" but "What was your last contact with the provincial government? Who exactly did you go to? What was the outcome? What about the time before that?"

"You can teach the basic elements of how to work with Afghans," said Gouttierre. "Avoid pork and alcohol. Show sincerity. Afghans like to talk. Engage them in a way that makes them want to talk to you. Find a way to negotiate differences."

Gouttierre and his colleagues have a lot of experience at this. The Center for Afghanistan Studies has designed and run numerous development projects—mostly on contract for the U.S. government, totaling a $100 million over 35 years. These have included providing education in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan during the Soviet occupation, bringing Afghan English teachers to study at the center and live with Nebraska families (for the Fulbright Foundation), and, currently, running literacy programs for the Afghan Army. "Our philosophy is to involve Afghans wherever possible," Gouttierre said. "Our programs are staffed almost exclusively by Afghans." At last count, he said, roughly 300 Afghans were employed in the Army literacy program, and many more at the Nebraska Education Press, in Kabul, now spun off as an independent NGO. Housed in a compound that once belonged to the Afghan Communist party, the press printed the Afghan constitution and millions of textbooks for the first post-Taliban opening of school.

Major Holbert—a fit and focused former social studies teacher in Lincoln, Nebraska, who served on the first HTT in Afghanistan in 2007—elaborated on the matter of learning to communicate in ways that build bonds. In the early days of the U.S. presence, soldiers sometimes threw candy and toys to children from moving vehicles. This drive-by benevolence was seen as demeaning. "Relationships are everything," said Holbert. HTT members are taught to take the time to drink the endless cups of tea, to invest in relationships. To counteract the constant churning of personnel in the field, HTTs are replaced one member at a time with, whenever possible, a month's overlap with their predecessor, who can make personal introductions so that local contacts aren't lost. Holbert's spiel exactly captured the spirit of General McChrystal's guidance—indeed, it almost seemed to track it word for word. As McChrystal wrote, addressing all coalition troops:

> The effort to gain and maintain [the support of the Afghan people] must inform every action we take. . . . We need to understand the people and see things through their eyes. . . . The way you drive, your dress and gestures, with whom you eat lunch, the courage with which you fight, the way you respond to an Afghan's grief or joy—this is all part of the argument. . . . Listen to and learn from our Afghan colleagues. . . . This is a battle of wits—learn and adapt more quickly than the insurgent.

The civilian HTTs actually face a double challenge. "The hardest culture to integrate with is the military," Holbert noted. "You need to project confidence and humility in order to be able to work well with your unit. So you get to know them. If your team is invited to a social activity, you go. If there's marksmanship training, you go. And on patrol you pull security. You are not a consumer of resources or producer of drama."

The subject of my second morning's lecture was the geology of Afghanistan. As students arrived in the darkened classroom, a video was running. It showed a mudslide, a roaring torrent of mud and boulders pouring over a cement dam in a craggy gorge. The footage had been shot near Kunduz by a German reconstruction team—the first time one of these events, which occur all over Afghanistan, had been filmed. The lecturer was John Shroder, professor of geography and geology and, like Gouttierre, a student of Afghanistan for four decades. Shroder is point man for the center's National Atlas of Afghanistan project, which collects and publishes mapable information on Afghanistan, and for its collaboration with NASA, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Academy of Sciences to monitor the glaciers of Afghanistan and Pakistan using satellite imagery. Shroder writes widely on Afghanistan's mineral and energy resources and their considerable potential for development, the subject he addressed for the HTT seminar.

Rounding out the morning was Professor Michael Bishop, expert in something called Geographic Information Science. He showed a rapt audience how using remote sensing and computer maps of Afghanistan they can display numerous physical features of the country—soil quality, vegetation, water, snow, cloud cover, and many more—at high resolution at the click of a mouse. This capability has myriad applications, from the design of irrigation systems to prediction of floods to the location of safe construction sites. It will be made available via a "reachback" system now being developed to allow HTTs to consult distant experts and databases by email.

During their time in Omaha, HTT trainees have classes in the history and politics of Afghanistan in the 20th century, Pashtun society and culture, women in Afghanistan,

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religion in Afghanistan, the Afghan Army and its evolving structure, the globalization of religious extremism, medicine in Afghanistan, and the role of drugs in international terrorism. Six of their ten instructors are Afghans. It's during their longer stay at Fort Leavenworth that they receive basic survival training and concentrate on social science methods and analysis. Some are sent to participate in exercises at a simulated Afghan village in Death Valley.

For their final exercise, team members are dropped off in small towns near Fort Leavenworth—places like Bonner Springs, Kansas (population 7,000) or Smithville, Missouri (population 6,000)—to assess the human terrain. They fan out in pairs or threes to interview locals. They introduce themselves as students from Fort Leavenworth who've been assigned, for instance, to ascertain how the town copes with flooding from the Missouri River.

For all of the HTT trainees I met, this foray into small-town America will have been a cross-cultural experience. They included a retired chemist with past Special Forces deployments in Vietnam and Panama; a former reporter with a couple of decades in the intelligence community under his belt; an ex-Marine intelligence officer who studied Arabic and international relations in college and deployed briefly to Iraq; a former environmental consultant who grew up in Asia and is multilingual; and a Special Forces vet who served three tours in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. One, an Afghan-American, told me he fled the Soviet occupation before finishing school but couldn't find work in Pakistan, so pressed on to the United States. He got jobs in fast food and supermarkets in Virginia and eventually drove a delivery van. After 9/11 he felt a strong desire to help Afghanistan. He managed to land a job with the U.S. military as a "role player" in one of the simulated villages used for training and worked his way up to interpreter. Now in his late 30s—and married, with an infant son—he is returning to his native land for the first time as a member of an HTT.

Inside a classroom.

One of the trainees I met is already "in theater," assigned to Jalalabad. Her unit is experimenting with what they call a Female Engagement Team, which has been dispatched to talk to women in mountain villages and to female prisoners at a juvenile detention center. She sent me pictures of their visit to a school for 400 girls.

No doubt her HTT is also keeping a careful eye on the evolving role of the local governor, Gul Agha Shirzai, who caused so much trouble in Kandahar back in 2003. He's become a figure of some renown, even being profiled back in March in the *Wall Street Journal*. Removed as governor of Kandahar by President Karzai in 2004, he was shortly thereafter reappointed to Nangarhar Province, in eastern Afghanistan, whose capital is Jalalabad. There he has managed to temper his reputation for corruption. Far from the home turf of his Barakzai tribe, and thus relieved of patronage duties (also, possibly, content with the fortune he has already amassed), he has burnished his image since the days when Sarah Chayes found him so arbitrary, predatory, and brutal. He is once again in good odor with the Americans. At their urging, he chaired a meeting of 25 tribal elders from four eastern provinces in late November, according to the *New York Times*, for the purpose of enlisting the elders' aid in persuading reconcilable elements of the Taliban to "sit down and talk."

Has Gul Agha Shirzai really changed? How is this transplant viewed by the indigenous power brokers of Nangarhar? Is his warlord past or his present cooperation with the coalition more indicative of the path ahead? They are questions of some consequence as the coalition attempts to midwife an Afghan version of the Anbar Awakening in Iraq, when tribal leaders switched sides and helped reverse the momentum of the insurgency.

They are also reminders that human terrain is always complex and elusive terrain, lacking the stable definition of a mountain pass or valley floor. The Human Terrain Teams and other innovations by which the U.S. armed forces are lessening their ignorance of the Afghan people are no doubt imperfect, even crude, instruments for meeting the challenges of a war where the enemy is at home and we come from far away, geographically and culturally. Regardless of the magnitude of the challenge, the HTTs and the rest will be judged by their success on the ground. Still, it is not too soon to recognize the energy and imagination with which the armed forces are working to apply their lessons learned. ♦

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Opening of the Gucci outlet, Shanghai

ZHU LIANGCHENG / CHINAFOTOPRESS / GETTY IMAGES

Postmodern Times

How globalization works

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

I didn't realize I was a worrywart until I read *Sonic Boom*.

Gregg Easterbrook is unique among journalists because his writing highlights the positive trends you never hear about on the nightly news. He's forever telling us to look on the bright side. His 1995 *A Moment on Earth* argued that environmental pollution was a solvable problem. *Beside Still Waters* (1998) attempted to reconcile rationalism with faith. *Progress Paradox* (2003) tried to figure out why, if almost everything is getting better all the time, we feel so miserable.

In *Sonic Boom*, Easterbrook argues that despite the recession, globalization is about to go into overdrive. The results will be greater worldwide prosperity and innovation, but also social dislocation and constant stress. What's more, "the main forces involved cannot be brought to a halt." I love good news as much as the next guy, but I couldn't help feeling the trends Easterbrook describes are a little more fragile than he lets on. Encountering a cockeyed optimist forces you to think pessimistically.

Sonic Boom
Globalization at Mach Speed
by Gregg Easterbrook
Random House, 272 pp., $26

Which isn't to say Easterbrook is incorrect. To the contrary: His thesis is compelling. "Before the downturn that became apparent in 2008," he writes,

> the larger global economic trend for three decades was rising prosperity for almost everyone, accelerating growth, higher living standards for average people, better education, increased ease of communication, low inflation, few shortages, and more personal freedom across most of the family of nations.

Jihadism notwithstanding, the last generation has seen the greatest advances in the human condition, ever. We are richer, we live longer, we are smarter (IQs appear to rise over time in a phenomenon known as the Flynn Effect), we are safer, we are more productive, and we are freer. Leave Boomer nostalgia to shows like *Mad Men*, where it belongs. The recession is bad, but like all recessions it will come to an end. Quite frankly, there has never been a better time to be alive.

Why? Globalization. Easterbrook begins his narrative in the late 1970s, when China's Deng Xiaoping declared the small fishing village of Shenzhen a "special economic zone" where markets

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could operate more or less freely. Today, Shenzhen is a city of nine million and one of the busiest ports in the world. The market revolution of the late 1970s and early '80s, in Deng's China but also in Margaret Thatcher's U.K. and Ronald Reagan's USA, set into motion a period of global economic integration, technological innovation, and almost uninterrupted prosperity. Between 1982 and 2007, America experienced only two recessions, and they were among the shortest and shallowest on record. Beginning in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet empire freed markets, liberated peoples, and seriously diminished the incidence of military conflict. All of this coincided with a revolution in electronics that dramatically lowered the cost of information, ramped up productivity, allowed practically instantaneous communication with anyone, anywhere on the globe, and created whole new economies on the Internet.

Laptops, cellphones, iPods, Facebook, and Google are important, but the greatest achievement of the age has been the reduction in global poverty. "Of the nearly 2.4 billion men and women who have joined the world's population in the last three decades—itself an amazing number—only one in nine has been born into terrible conditions," Easterbrook writes, "while conditions for the other eight fall somewhere on the spectrum of okay to really nice." Easterbrook illustrates his point well when he points out that, "since beginning to liberalize, China has pulled up out of deep poverty a number almost equivalent to the entire population of Brazil." If present trends continue—this might not happen—in another 30 years there will be hardly any Chinese living in extreme poverty. India has joined in the game as well, enriching her economy and thereby strengthening her democracy. Nor is the progress limited to the rising powers. In a recent *New York Times* column, George Mason economist Tyler Cowen pointed out that Indonesia, Brazil, Colombia, and Peru have all made great strides over the last decade. Chile, once an autocratic backwater, is a prosperous market democracy.

Prior to the last 30 years, life for most people fit Thomas Hobbes's description of "poor, nasty, brutish, and short." But Hobbes lived in a world without developed market economies, free trade, and steadily advancing technology. Maybe the author of *Leviathan* would have been a more optimistic guy had he lived in the early 21st century! Increasingly, for most people, life is pretty good, peaceable, and long. Even with the recession, the United States is far richer than it was 30 years ago, and crime and pollution are in decline. (In 2009, New York City was the safest it's been since the early 1960s.) America's problems are born of success: A society concerned with obesity and clothing for pets is one that is no longer concerned with starvation or nuclear war. Our challenge today is maintaining and augmenting what we already have: global economic and military dominance.

Sonic Boom is not relentlessly cheery, however. The emerging economic order has its dark side. "Get used to a ceaseless, low-grade sense of economic emergency," Easterbrook says, "even if all goods and services are in ample supply, even if the local grocery store is fully stocked, busy, and open twenty-four hours." Global competition will make all of us incredibly uneasy, for three reasons: Jobs are going to be less secure; inequality is going to rise; and the more we have to lose, the more anxious we'll be about losing it. The danger is that these forces could give rise to political movements that mitigate—or reverse—the best parts of the sonic boom.

With unemployment at 10 percent, the jobs issue is already at the forefront of our politics. Eventually the economy will recover and unemployment will fall. But job insecurity will remain. This won't be entirely bad; one sign of a thriving market is business creation and destruction. The constant grind means entrepreneurs are able to test their theories of which products and services consumers want. And since businessmen are not always right, many startups go under. People lose jobs. America's flexible labor markets allocate workers efficiently, but they also allow firms to hire and fire employees with relative ease. Thus the American jobs machine often leaves workers looking for their next gig.

The economists call this "job churn," or the unending turnover of new hires and displaced workers. In 2005, for example, no less than 60 million Americans had a change in employment status. Such tumult not only enriches the economy, it leaves everybody stressed out. As Easterbrook puts it, "an economy in which jobs flash in and out of existence like subatomic particles in a physics experiment makes even those who have good jobs feel insecure." Rising productivity allows American firms to do more with less; this also means fewer jobs in certain sectors. For example, did you know the United States produced 15 million *more* tons of steel in 2007 than in 1970? Probably not, since the media only cover U.S. steel when there are job losses or attempts to slap tariffs on Chinese imports. And sure enough, while the tonnage of U.S. steel has risen, the number of U.S. steelworkers has fallen. There were only 159,000 steelworkers in 2007, down from 531,000 in 1970. Expect job churn to continue as American companies compete with businesses in China, India, and Southeast Asia, where labor is cheap. The days of lifetime employment at a single firm are over, unless the firm in question is the U.S. government.

Another feature of the economy will be rising inequality. Poverty is declining and middle-class incomes are growing, but not nearly as quickly as those of the rich. For some high school graduates, a union card and factory employment continue to serve as doors into the middle class; the problem is those doors are being shipped to Asia. Brawn is giving way to brains. The service economy rewards education, social skills, and creative thinking. Every field has its celebrities who reap fortunes far greater than the average worker. Easterbrook points out that, since 2005, there have been at least 300,000 U.S. households making more than $1 million a year. That's "the population of Saint Paul, Minnesota—America has produced the equivalent of an entire city of millionaires." Compared with 99.9 percent of the human beings who have ever existed, poor Americans live like French nobility during the *ancien régime*. Understandably, however, a narrative of gradual historical progress,

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thanks to market competition, doesn't make the poor feel any better about themselves. Mass media compound feelings of relative deprivation, since they beam images of wealthy decadence directly into people's homes and laptops. Politicians cater to their constituents' short-term desires and resentments, and gain influence when they redistribute wealth to powerful interest groups.

The widening disparity of incomes may gradually erode the longstanding American ethos of social equality. This is a serious concern, but it's hard to know what to do about it. The preferred liberal answer, high marginal tax rates and increased union membership, would only make everybody poorer by sending investment capital and jobs overseas. The preferred conservative answer, school choice and continued economic growth, is no panacea, either. Note to policymakers: Pay more attention to Ron Haskins, Easterbrook's colleague at the Brookings Institution. Haskins recommends more education at all levels, full-time employment, and creating incentives for family cohesion. None of Haskins's recommendations would eliminate inequality overnight; that would be impossible, and probably not even desirable (some inequality, after all, is a recognition of human diversity and an incentive to personal improvement). Nevertheless, these sorts of policies would help the poor get a leg up. They'd demonstrate America's commitment to social mobility and equal rights. In the meantime, government could discourage aristocracies of wealth by eliminating corporate welfare, tax loopholes, and subsidies that favor market incumbents.

Effective policy will be rare, however, in a world where governments have less power. "If it hadn't been shown a hundred times before," Easterbrook writes, "the financial-world events of the last two years proved that even the most powerful officials have little clue what the economy is about to do, and only a mild, limited ability to influence economic events once they commence." Moreover, when officials attempt to influence the economy, they often don't know the results of their actions for some time. The consensus view, for instance, is that changes in Federal Reserve policy take about two years to work their way through the economy. How do you cover a two-year-long policy in a five-minute packet of information on cable news?

It's a perennial: Focused on the most recent crisis, politicians neglect not only the potential unintended consequences of their actions, but also unforeseen developments that might render those actions moot. In January 2009, the Obama administration told the country that a $1 trillion stimulus plan would hold unemployment to 8 percent. Congress passed the plan, only to watch as unemployment rose to 10.2 percent. The economy doesn't allow you to take a mulligan: The stimulus saddled the country with more debt while not doing much to improve the overall economic picture. As a result, the administration's options in 2010 are limited. Voters and elected officials are understandably worried that the national debt is on an unsustainable course. Hence, both left-wing proposals for even more deficit spending and right-wing proposals to cut taxes on corporations, payrolls, and capital gains are likely to face sharp resistance.

Luckily for Obama's reelection chances, however, market economies are resilient. History shows, for instance, that American markets can survive high marginal tax rates; they just won't perform as well as they could (and the government won't collect as much revenue as it could) if rates were kept low. The animal spirits that propel a kid tooling around in his garage won't be stopped by Barney Frank's latest regulatory shenanigans. Bad economic policy can hamper or drive out the risk-taking activity crucial to growth. But, since we live in a large federal republic in the midst of a bustling global marketplace, risk-takers just pack up and relocate to more hospitable locales. In the last decade, California's losses have been Texas's gains, and Wall Street's post-Sarbanes-Oxley doldrums were a boon for London.

American politicians, Easterbrook says, are largely irrelevant to American economic fortunes. They can pass laws that improve or retard the chances for growth, but the economy is integrated to the point where national policies are less important than they used to be. Not only do companies have to worry about the Federal Trade Commission when they want to merge, they have to consider the European Commission, too. Or consider that Chinese currency manipulation may have more of an effect on the American job market than any of the Obama administration's stimulus plans. And Barack Obama can do little about it.

"Perhaps we are entering an era of uncommanded institutions," Easterbrook writes, "in which more and more aspects of our lives will be influenced by truly huge numbers of people at home and abroad, yet no one is in charge." Paradoxically, then, the integration of the global economy has led to fragmented decision-making. Billions of investors and consumers worldwide matter more than any single prince. This has been a doubly good thing, since it has meant (a) we are all getting richer, and (b) politicians have less of an ability to screw up our lives. But it has also led to the unending worry that no one, including ourselves, is in control.

We fear that "the system will methodically destroy itself, of course without intending to." Easterbrook calls this fear "collapse anxiety," and it's a major component of life in the sonic boom. Human nature being what it is, we look for leaders to dominate communities and make decisions with tangible consequences for you and me. The big man rules. No surprise there—humans have organized societies in such a way for most of our existence as a species. In some places, the pattern continues today.

But a different pattern applies to advanced market societies like the United States. Democracy and free economics limit the power of a single man to dominate his environment. The upside is dispersed power, more human liberty, and greater prosperity. The downside? A crisis in authority. "For centuries, people have looked to the top figures of the business and intellectual worlds as father figures for society," Easterbrook argues. As the power of institutions wanes, the influence of elites wanes, too. Mass democracy checks the influence of political figures, even the president. Product lines no longer depend on the

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whim of a central planner but on the aggregated taste of millions of consumers. Not long ago, a few writers in New York decided what counted as fashionable opinion; today, no group of intellectuals has a monopoly on ideas.

As the economy becomes more complex, individuals become more important than authorities and institutions. It thus becomes harder to discern cause and effect. Take the financial crisis, for example. What caused it? Some say it was greedy bankers and mortgage lenders; others, foolish government regulators; still others, huge economic imbalances between the United States and China. Maybe one of these stories is correct. More likely, they are all correct, to some degree.

In a globalized world, therefore, it becomes difficult to untangle the chains of events that produce layoffs, laptops, and lattes. In an era of rapid and profound change, we no longer believe we are the captains of our fates. "Once millions of people could say to themselves words to the effect of, 'Whatever else happens, at least I belong to/work for/worship at a great institution that is widely respected and making the world a better place.'" Nowadays—not so much. "It's going to be the Super Bowl of stress," Easterbrook concludes. "Chances are it's going to go well. Chances are it won't be relaxing."

The weakness in *Sonic Boom* is that, for a supporter of free markets, Easterbrook is incredibly deterministic. He's convinced the trends he describes will continue unabated. "We must make our peace with the forces of the present," he writes. "Wishing they would go away is a waste of everyone's time. No clock has ever been turned back." Maybe so, but human beings are not clocks. History is a series of peaks and valleys; nothing is permanent. Previous eras of globalization did not end happily. The period of rapid industrialization and free trade at the beginning of the 20th century came to a horrific end in the First World War. After that conflict shattered Europe, the global economy recovered and a new era of international cooperation seemed at hand. More than 60 nations, including Germany and Japan, signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact outlawing war. But treaties and good feelings did not stop the Great Depression. And Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, and Tojo were more than happy to reverse liberal gains.

So, too, when the financial crisis struck in 2008, pundits declared an end to the era of "market fundamentalism." The globe, it was argued, had entered a new age in which governments would play larger roles in the economy. Easterbrook says these obituaries for capitalism are premature: "All postwar recessions have ended in a resumption of previous trends." If he's right, then all we have to do is watch television until the economy recovers. What's missing from Easterbrook's account, however, is politics—the role that law and regulation plays in shaping the future. Perhaps it is the case that politics isn't as important in the sonic boom economy. Or perhaps politics is important to the extent that communities *want* it to be important. Over the last generation, the market has delivered increasing returns on a global scale and regulation has played a diminished role in economic life. Taxes were kept low. The cost of creating and maintaining a business was kept low. The size of government relative to the economy remained stable. In some cases, government's reach was drastically reduced.

If these policies had not been in effect, what would the world look like today? Chances are, we would be neither as prosperous nor as free. Politics matters. It may be folly to try to stop change, but that doesn't mean people won't try. Right now, markets are in disrepute. Powerful forces in American life want to increase regulation, hike taxes, boost labor unions, and limit free trade. All of these initiatives would interfere in the operations of the global economy and thus leave us worse off. More regulation and higher taxes favor established firms; venture capitalists, startups, and innovators suffer. Unions lead to high unemployment and an inflationary price/wage spiral. Trade barriers raise prices and build walls between nations. Easterbrook says the sonic boom will provoke consternation, frustration, and worry. What he doesn't say is that those feelings could lead to a reactionary politics that turns the boom into a bust.

Tract House, Maryland

HISHAM IBRAHIM / GETTY IMAGES

The international scene isn't stable, either. It's true, as Easterbrook notes, that both military spending and war are in decline. But on the question of *why* this has happened he's a little fuzzy. The money that nation-states devote to defense fell from $1.5 trillion in 1985 to $1.3 trillion in 2008. "Studies show that violent conflicts, both between and within states, rose steadily from 1955 to 1989, hit their post-World War II maximum in that year, declined steadily until 2003, the year of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and since have risen slightly but remain below the level of the late 1970s." What world-historical event happened in 1989?

War isn't declining because governments spend less on their militaries; it's declining because the United States defeated the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Strategic victory lessened the

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chances of military conflict by removing Soviet support for international terrorist and guerrilla movements, bringing more countries under the American security umbrella, and boosting the American ideology of democratic capitalism. In an international system where a hegemonic power provides the bulk of global public goods, and maintains security from the Balkans to the Korean DMZ, most allied governments can afford to spend less on their militaries.

America's rise to global primacy has coincided with unprecedented peace and prosperity. You may not like the amount of money America spends on defense, but those dollars contribute to the world Easterbrook describes in his book. If anything, America ought to devote *more* resources to meeting her global responsibilities—who else is going to do it? American power is the pillar supporting a world of free trade and free people. Remove the pillar, and the world becomes a very different place.

National interests will not disappear in the sonic boom. Nor is the world steadily marching toward convergence. Russia invaded Georgia in 2008 because the Putin regime could not countenance Caucasian democracy and wanted to see it weakened. The Iranian mullahs have wrecked their domestic economy and are hellbent on acquiring a nuclear weapon. Hugo Chávez spreads Venezuela's oil wealth around Latin America to further the cause of "Bolivarian socialism." Kim Jong Il maintains his nuclear slave state in North Korea. Individually, these challenges don't compare to the security dilemmas of the 20th century. Collectively, however, they have provoked a systemic crisis, as Cold War institutions such as the United Nations and NATO find themselves riven with disagreement and unable to isolate and neutralize rogue actors.

The rise of China to great power status is a remarkable event that Easterbrook greets with sanguinity. No question, the Chinese enjoy greater personal freedom today than they did only a decade ago. Economic growth has been a tremendous boon for the Chinese people. Equally important is the Chinese government's decision to work within the American-led international system. China participates in regional and global institutions including the U.N. and the World Trade Organization. The Chinese and American economies have become inseparable. More than a decade has passed since the last crisis in the Taiwan Strait. The two powers eye each other warily, but find they can get along (more often than not). "The world's two most important nations are not angling to destroy each other," Easterbrook writes; "rather, they are for the most part engaged in cooperative competition that for the most part benefits both." Let's enjoy it while it lasts.

Easterbrook acknowledges the Sino-American relationship is subject to radical change, but he doesn't really examine how that might happen. He comes across as confident that economic and technological progress will force the Chinese dictatorship to liberalize. Perhaps so, but authoritarian governments display a remarkable tenacity when their existence is threatened. Liberalization is not the only option. China's technocrats depend on economic growth and robust nationalism to maintain their rule: Growth might disappear and lead to further social upheaval, or nationalism might spin out of control and lead to a belligerent China. Neither scenario is palatable.

Rather than examine these darker futures, however, Easterbrook views China through rose-colored glasses. He describes China as "a great state *not* attempting to establish a dominant military." Not quite! No one can read the 2009 report of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission and reach Easterbrook's conclusion. The Chinese government is engaged in a three-decade long military build-up and modernization program aimed at changing the People's Liberation Army from an ill-equipped defense force to an arm of national policy able to project power abroad. The scope of Chinese political, economic, and security interests continues to expand. China's defense budget is second only to the United States'. As America decommissions aircraft carriers, China wants to build her first. The Economic and Security Review Commission concludes that "the intelligence services of the Chinese government are actively involved in operations directed against the United States and against U.S. interests. China is the most aggressive country conducting espionage against the United States." Yet Easterbrook says "the government of China believes it will never go to war with the United States." It sure doesn't act like it.

The point is not that conflict between the United States and China is inevitable; the point is that *nothing* is inevitable. The advance in human liberty and welfare is the result of centuries of contingent and unpredictable actions and reactions. Plenty of those gains have been institutionalized, and it's hard to see them disappearing overnight—but that does not mean humans are no longer able to inflict suffering on others.

What's stopping them? Since its inception, the United States has been a revolutionary engine of commerce and liberalism; if we ignore our legacy and neglect our responsibilities, American power will wane and so will the fortunes of others. The "post-American world" is in vogue, but it is telling that most of Easterbrook's examples of innovation are drawn from American entrepreneurs. Easterbrook is right to say the future is bright. He's right to point out the downsides as well. But the real lesson of his book is that the future he describes depends on American domestic competition and international strength.

Which is why I worry. The political class has made some foolish choices lately. Elites have bought into a narrative of American decline. Both Republican and Democratic Congresses have gone on epic spending sprees. Debt service and entitlements threaten to consume the entire budget. The only expenditure President Obama seems eager to cut is defense. The business climate is plagued by uncertainty. Taxes are going to go up. Enterprising young Americans are beginning to search for opportunities abroad.

Luckily, the American people remain sensible. The public disapproves of the return of big government. Democrats know they have overreached, and want to return to the center in 2010. There are signs of economic improvement as well,

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from the Chicago purchasing index, to the stock market rally, to the improving yield curve. And if the elected branches of government don't lead the way, the people will, whether at the ballot box or in the business world.

So why not take Gregg Easterbrook's advice and ignore the doomsayers? Look around. Things are starting to change once more. Feel the ground rattle beneath your feet. Hear the drone overhead. A boom is coming. ♦

B&A

Prodigy in Pictures

When films were movies, Irving Thalberg was the (young) man to see in Hollywood. **BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN**

Early one morning in 1970, at my desk at the now long defunct Chicago publishing firm called Quadrangle Books, the receptionist called to say that a man had arrived with a manuscript he would like to leave with me. The man, smallish, handsome, with delicate features and light red hair, entered without saying a word, set on my desk a manuscript in black binders, with the title *Enigmas of Agency* on a white label on its front cover. I opened it to the first page, where I noted the author's name. I looked up. "Yes," the man said, "I am his son."

His name was Irving Thalberg Jr., and the manuscript was a work of technical philosophy. He was, I now realize, 40 years old, and taught at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "Look," he said, "I'm not trying to buy you off or anything of the kind, but if you want to publish this book, and the cost of publication is a problem, I have a fund out of which I can defer the expenses. But only, you understand, if you really want to publish the book."

No one at the firm, it turned out, thought the book was for us—it was eventually published in England by Allen & Unwin—but I have always regretted not having invited its author out for coffee or a lunch. So many things I should have liked to talk with him about. His mother was Norma Shearer, a great beauty and one of the few movie stars to make the transition from silent to talking movies with her popularity increased. Irving Thalberg Jr. died of cancer, in 1987 at 56, living 19 years longer than his father, who pegged out at 37 in 1936, the most famous and by all odds the most talented producer in the history of American movies.

Irving Thalberg
Boy Wonder to Producer Prince
by Mark A. Vieira
California, 528 pp., $34.95

What exactly it is that a producer does has never been altogether clear. As much as he can get away with is, I suppose, one answer. For the producer usually represents "the money," and money, as the saying has it, talks, too often ignorantly and vulgarly—that is, if one is to listen to directors and writers. The problem is that, without producers, movies don't get made, nothing gets done, and all one is left with is the sound of no hands clapping to the accompaniment of a chorus of vastly overpaid and highly articulate bitching.

No ordinary producer, Irving Thalberg was the man on whom F. Scott Fitzgerald modeled Monroe Stahr, the hero of his final and uncompleted Hollywood novel *The Last Tycoon*. Fitzgerald was among the scores of writers Thalberg hired while chief of production at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Ardently though Fitzgerald wanted to succeed at the job—he needed the money and, down on his luck, was looking for a victory of any kind—he couldn't bring it off. As a screenwriter, he saw words when pictures were wanted; he wrote dialogue when action was called for. But he also saw in Irving Thalberg a genius of a rare kind, a high-level artist who produced no art of his own but bent all his efforts at releasing and orchestrating the talent of others. Beyond counting are the number of movies Thalberg helped get made, improved, burnished from pure dross to high and entertaining gloss and, sometimes, a little more than mere entertainment.

While alive Irving Thalberg never allowed his name to appear in the screen credits for a single film. He may not have craved fame as it is usually packaged, but he was far from self-effacing. "I, more than any other single person in Hollywood," he declared, "have my finger on the pulse of America. I know what people will do and what they won't." Making decisions was for him never a problem. He told Fitzgerald that "when you're planning a new enterprise on a grand scale, the people under you mustn't ever know or guess that you're in any doubt, because they've all got to have something to look up to and they mustn't ever dream that you're in doubt about any decision." He never bullied anyone under him but was not to be fooled with.

The word "filmmaker" has been much bandied around in recent decades, usually applied to directors sufficiently modest to eschew the more pretentious "auteur." But in the history of American movies, there may have been only one true filmmaker: a man whose hand and mind were there from inception through conception of hundreds of movies, seeing to each detail and without whose behind-the-scene participation the movie would fail to exist—and that man was Irving Thalberg.

Born in 1899, growing up in a period before people wasted four to six years going off to acquire so-called higher education, Thalberg began young. His first job was with Universal City, where, by the time he was 20, he was made general manager, at a respectable salary of $450 a week, with the responsibility

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of running daily operations. He was small—5'6", 122 pounds—but from the first possessed of a quiet authority. When he attempted to hold the line on Erich von Stroheim's outrageous spending on a movie, von Stroheim, with characteristic modesty, said: "Since when does a child instruct a genius?" Not long thereafter, Thalberg fired von Stroheim, an act, according to David O. Selznick, that "took guts and courage," and it also changed power relations in movie-making forever, with the producers now being understood ultimately to rank above the directors of films.

Courage, confidence, cool executive ability of the highest order, none of this, for Irving Thalberg, was in short supply. What was in short supply was time. From a very early age, he knew he was going to die young. He was a "blue baby," born having a poor supply of oxygen to the blood and given a medical prognosis calling for him not to last much beyond the age of 30. The dark prospect of early death, some say, gave Thalberg especial clarity about his own life and what he wished to do with it of a kind unavailable to those who wait until 80 to begin to believe that there is an odd chance they could possibly die. He had a strong mother; his father, like that of George Gershwin, another contemporary Jewish genius, seemed, as the old joke about Jewish husbands has it, not to have had a speaking part. Henrietta Thalberg, Mark A. Vieira, Thalberg's excellent biographer, writes, "had given her son a sense of self—his poise, his impatience with mediocrity, his need to achieve success within a limited time."

Vieira's *Irving Thalberg, Boy Wonder to Producer Prince* is the third biography of Thalberg, and far and away the most thoroughly researched, comprehensive, and penetrating. The book follows from, and carefully fills out, the biographical essay that Vieira wrote for his sumptuous but serious coffee-table book called *Hollywood Dreams Made Real*, about Thalberg and the rise of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. In the new work Vieira recounts what Thalberg accomplished, how he was able to achieve what he did, and over whose live bodies he brought it all off. This book is as close to definitive as any biography of Irving Thalberg is likely to get.

On the first page of *The Last Tycoon*, the novel's female narrator remarks of the Stahr/Thalberg hero that "not half a dozen men have ever been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads." (*The Whole Equation* is the title that the English movie critic David Thomson gave to his recent history of Hollywood.) Thalberg quickly picked up on the equation, and could manipulate it brilliantly. He thought, really, of little else but movies; on his wedding day, while dressing, Vieira reports, he was discussing scripts.

What Thalberg understood is that movies are not merely primarily but entirely about storytelling, and, though he could not himself write stories (or movie scripts), he had a fine understanding of why some stories worked—and quite as important, why others did not. Every good movie requires at least one unforgettable scene, he held. Character is key, he held. Thalberg it was who came up with the notion that the Marx Brothers would be a lot funnier if they played their exhuberant zaniness off rigid social institutions: the opera, the university, diplomacy, thoroughbred racing, high society. He never wrote any of the Marx Brothers scripts, but without this central idea, the genius of the Marx Brothers would never have come to the glorious fruition that it did.

Irving Thalberg, Norma Shearer, Louis B. Mayer, 1932

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

One of Thalberg's obsessions was to try to comprehend, as one of his screenwriters put it, "why some films could tune into an audience and others could not." He once told Charles McArthur that his own "tastes are exactly those of the audience. What I didn't like, they won't like." He was enormously patient, prepared to have scenes shot and reshot as often as required. Movies are not made, he held, but remade. He was a surgeon, one of his screenwriters remarked, "who cut to heal." One of his sub-producers, Lawrence Weingarten, remarked: "Thalberg directed the film on paper, and then the director directed the film on film." Here, in a single sentence, is Irving Thalberg's philosophy of filmmaking: "The difference between something good and something bad is great, but the difference between something good and something superior is often very small." That small but crucial difference was, of course, a large part of the whole equation.

F. Scott Fitzgerald said that the sign of high intelligence resides in the ability to keep two contradictory ideas in one's mind at the same time and still function. Thalberg seems to have been able to keep as many as 50 movies in his mind at once, and through subtle but firm indirection, also keep any number of egomaniacs on the job, fend off the Hays Office on censorship, satisfy a difficult Louis B. Mayer and money-minded partners in New York—in short, keep an entire studio functioning without ever seeming in the least ruffled.

Only a monomaniac could bring this off, a man with a wide but deeply grooved, single-tracked mind. Ben Hecht, who worked with Thalberg and whose abiding, sometimes hyperbolic, cynicism about the movies is never wholly out of order, wrote of him: "He hadn't the faintest idea what was going on anywhere in the world except in his office. He lived two-thirds of the time in the projection room. He saw only movies. He never saw life. He had never noticed life. He was a hermit. He

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hadn't the faintest idea what human beings did—but he knew what their shadows should do."

Irving Thalberg was the founding father of the studio system, a movie-making assembly line that made it possible to turn out as many as 50 or so movies a year. This system, responsible for so much trash and not a few gems, required the regular turnover of what nowadays would be called product: Movies to feed the many movie chains—MGM had a partnership with Loews—during a time when more than three-fifths of Americans saw at least one movie a week. So good was Thalberg at running this monster machine that, during 1932, the worst year of the Depression, MGM showed a profit of $8 million.

The studio system was famously hell on talent, especially literary talent. Among the more glittering literary names Thalberg brought to MGM were Anita Loos, William Faulkner, Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, James M. Cain, P.G. Wodehouse, George S. Kaufman, Sidney Howard, and S.N. Behrman. In *The Last Tycoon*, Fitzgerald has Monroe Stahr remark that he hires good writers, "but when they get out here, they're not good writers—so we have to work with the material we have." Thalberg worked writers in pairs; sometimes, as Fitgzerald has Stahr say, "I've had as many as three pairs working independently on the same idea," without one set knowing what the others are doing.

Individual talent never came close to taking precedence under the old studio system, with the exception only of actors, whom Thalberg largely considered a species of children. Thalberg was excellent at choosing, cultivating, and caring for stars. He wrote:

> In pictures, the actor, even more than the play, is the thing. He, more than the author, even more than the director, must hold the mirror up to life. By his ability to convey the author's and the director's ideas to the screen and to the people out front, he must transport his audience into a dream world.

Thalberg was not without his blind spots. Vieira notes that he was initially wrong about sound movies, thinking they would not soon (if ever) fully replace silent movies. He was wrong, too, about technicolor, and had to be pushed into it. He was not without standard Hollywood greed, though this can be explained by his understanding that, in Hollywood, you are finally measured by what you are paid. Nor was he above engaging in ego wars with Louis B. Mayer.

Thalberg began as Mayer's golden boy. In time, though, Mayer seems to have been made nervous by the younger man's mania for control. The two men's tastes in movies differed widely, with Mayer's running to the sentimental and prudish, never crossing the line of the middlebrow. He also did not appreciate that Thalberg made sure that he received the salary and rewards coming to him, every penny and every perk. Thalberg's wanting control and money, too, was, according to Vieira, the cause of the breakdown between them. At one point, Mayer brought in his son-in-law David O. Selznick to undermine Thalberg's authority. Eventually Thalberg's empire at MGM was broken up, leaving him in charge only of something called "the Thalberg unit," no longer the entire studio, and feeling, as he told colleagues, betrayed. As Vieira wrote in *Hollywood Dreams Made Real*: "Mayer wanted to be appreciated. Thalberg wanted to make films his own way. Neither would acknowledge the other's needs." In the end, Mayer won because he, with his partners in New York, controlled the money—and in Hollywood, then as now and now as forever, the money wins.

The theme of Irving Thalberg's life, in Vieira's recounting, goes beyond the extraordinary level of his odd gifts for organization, the freakishness of his youthful accomplishments. The theme of Thalberg's life was his pure love for making movies. He was always ready to spend more money to get things right; MGM in his day was known as "Retake Valley." He was not opposed to experiment in movies, and thought it good for the industry. No matter how many poor movies were made, he insisted on emphasizing the good ones. He devoted himself to legitimizing movies in the mind of the American public. Behind all this was Thalberg's belief that movies, surpassing the stage, the novel, and all else, were "the greatest form of expression yet."

He was, alas, wrong in this judgment, but far from wrong in trying to raise the level of movies as the great American—and eventually global—art form. In a scene in *The Last Tycoon*, Monroe Stahr is walking the beach near an oceanfront home he is building, when he encounters a black man collecting grunion. They get into conversation, and the man asks Stahr what he does. When he tells him that he works for "the pictures," the man replies that he never goes to the movies—"There's no profit" in them, he says—and he tells Stahr that he "never lets his children go, either." The following day, when he returns to his office, Stahr tells himself that the black man was wrong, and determines that "a picture, many pictures, a decade of pictures, must be made to show him he was wrong." Stahr straightaway cancels four borderline movies he has in the works, and puts back on the front burner a difficult movie he earlier decided not to do. "He rescued it," Fitzgerald writes, "for the Negro man."

Fitzgerald did not get far enough with his novel to bring Monroe Stahr/Irving Thalberg to his death. Life, as the physicians of his infancy had promised, took care of that detail, when Thalberg's heart, after a number of earlier attacks, gave out in 1936, at the age of 37. "Thalberg Dead!" ran the headlines on the day he died.

Thalberg's deft hand made possible many swell movies—*Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Grand Hotel*, *The Good Earth*, *Marie Antoinette*, *A Day at the Races*, *A Night at the Opera*, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, and several more—and many entirely forgettable ones among the roughly 400 he worked on. His heritage, in Mark Vieira's view, is in his aspirations for movies as popular but still complex art, movies that could be quirky, took chances, were made without formula, and for grown-ups. Through the painstaking working-out of detail, Irving Thalberg more than anyone else before or since was able to pry magic from film—the same magic that keeps many of us going back to the movies week after week, even though by now we should know that the odds against our finding more of that same magic are considerable. ♦

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B&A

Buyers Beware

A guide for the perplexed, reflexively leftist, consumer.

BY MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER

In *Bleak House* Charles Dickens satirized the excesses of what he called "telescopic philanthropy" through the character of Mrs. Jellyby. She has dirty hair, a dirty house, and dirty children, for all that matters in Mrs. Jellyby's life is the remote African colony of Borrioboola-Gha, a region that means more to her than her own life or her family. Mrs. Jellyby's eyes, Dickens wrote, "had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off, as if . . . they could see nothing nearer than Africa!"

The Blue Pages
A Directory of Companies Rated by Their Politics and Practices
by Angie Crouse and the Center for Responsive Politics
PoliPoint, 320 pp., $12.95

The Mrs. Jellybys of our time are on the left, and they practice telescopic philanthropy with every purchase they make. For liberals, the routine pleasures of shopping are ruined by the nightmare that their dollars support rapacious capitalism. For consumers who believe that businesses, run by overpaid, evil white men, are ravagers of the earth, Third World exploiters, high-fructose corn-syrup pushers, union busters, global warmers, and media manipulators, *The Blue Pages* will reinforce their prejudices.

Michael Dukakis was once famously attracted to books about Swedish land-use planning, and *The Blue Pages* features an endorsement from Howard Dean, who says that he was "riveted as he looked through" the first edition. This second edition divides the world of business into 13 categories, and each corporation has under its listing campaign contributions, the amount a business spends on lobbying, and practices the authors like and dislike.

The sections are prefaced by essays from the sorts of writers Howard Dean finds riveting. Each writer fulminates against corporate abuses. Norman Solomon, for example, denounces Clear Channel Broadcasting as "a conservative radio chain," which will be news to listeners who turn to Clear Channel stations for sports talk and pop music. Jane Black, an objective, non-ideological food reporter for the *Washington Post*, explains that restaurant chains exploit their workers and are a major contributor to the national rise in obesity. Chris Colin denounces big-box stores for destroying the environment, acquiring land via "imminent" domain, and wrecking the economy both when the stores open and when they close. He does, however, find one virtue in big-box stores: "The top-selling 2009 wall calendar at major retailers around the country was one featuring Barack Obama."

To examine the method of *The Blue Pages*, let's do some shopping. You want a soda. What's better, Coke or Pepsi? Coca-Cola, the authors charge, allegedly uses "paramilitary groups to kill union activists in South America," commits unspecified "environmental offenses" in India, and purportedly promotes child labor in El Salvador. But the company also has a lot of electric vehicles and is, according to DiversityInc, number nine in the "Top 50 Companies for Diversity" and gives AIDS treatment to workers at its African facilities. Finally, in an issue by which the writers are curiously obsessed, Coca-Cola's health insurance will pay for sex-change operations, or in politically correct terms, "transition to transgender identity."

As for PepsiCo, the *Blue Pages* writers say that their Indian plants also have unspecified environmental offenses, and also allegedly pump "aquifers dry in areas where people are poor and water hard to find." (We aren't told where these areas are.) However, DiversityInc ranked PepsiCo number 24 on their Top 50 diversity list, the Environmental Protection Agency gave the firm an award for its substantial purchases of "green energy," and the company's health insurance pays for some (but not all) sex-change operations.

Where will you buy that soda? Where I live, the two major supermarket chains are Giant, a subsidiary of the Dutch firm Royal Ahold, and Safeway. *The Blue Pages* tells us that Royal Ahold's Czech operation, Hypernova, allegedly failed to pay overtime and paid women less than men. In addition, the firm was "criticized for a lack of action regarding the plight of agricultural workers who earn poverty wages." (They don't say who made the critique or what Royal Ahold was supposed to do to remedy the situation.) Yet, the company uses energy-saving devices in its stores and practices recycling. We aren't given any information about Royal Ahold's sex-change operation policies.

Safeway, says *The Blue Pages*, had to pay part of a $22.4 million fine for not paying its workers overtime and was "named in a lawsuit" with two other California supermarket chains accused of colluding to simultaneously lock out workers in the event that one of them was struck by a union. However, Safeway uses solar energy in 23 of its California stores, and the Human Rights Campaign gives the company 75 out of 100 in its Corporate Equality Index—even though the company won't pay for sex-change operations.

Two points should be made about *The Blue Pages*'s methods. The first concerns tort reform. For the authors, all lawsuits are good lawsuits. We are repeatedly told when a company is sued, but not told who is doing the suing, how much money the trial lawyers made in the suit, or whether the lawsuit resulted in

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constructive change or just made trial lawyers even richer without providing any benefit to consumers.

The second lacuna concerns corporate philanthropy. *The Blue Pages* provides sporadic information about corporate giving, but not about gifts to liberal activists. For, as the Capital Research Center has repeatedly shown, large corporations are far more likely to support the enemies of capitalism than champions of free enterprise. The center's most recent research, conducted in 2006, surveyed the *Fortune* 100 corporations and found that these companies gave $59 million to leftwing organizations but only $4 million to rightwing groups. Readers of this book, however, will not know which liberal groups get corporate money.

The Center for Responsive Politics, which provided the political contribution data in this book, acknowledges funding from six large foundations. Readers of *The Blue Pages* can't connect these foundations with their corporate parents. For example, the wealth which endows the Pew Charitable Trust comes from Sun Oil (now Sunoco). Readers are told that Sunoco was a guilty party in class action lawsuits involving the alleged carcinogen MTBE and for oil spills in an unspecified wildlife refuge—but not that the wealth created by the company made *The Blue Pages* possible.

The readers of *The Blue Pages* are liberals who fret about *everything*: Czech labor practices, polluting Indian soda companies, California labor unions, and transgendered people everywhere. But to be concerned about everything is to be concerned about nothing. What consumer chooses a supermarket based on whether California workers are more important than Czech ones? Who can say that Indian pollution is more or less important than workers in El Salvador—particularly if you've never been to India or El Salvador?

There's a simpler way consumers can ensure that their purchases help constructive social change. Buy what you need, buy what's on sale—and donate the money you save to charities *you* like. That's a far better way to produce constructive social change than the tortured calculus of *The Blue Pages*. ♦

B&A

Madison Rules

The astonishing influence of one Midwestern history department. **BY JOHN MILTON COOPER**

In the hands of the right author, a seemingly dull and parochial subject can become an engaging and exciting book. Take, for example, the curriculum of a stuffy, snobbish Ivy League men's college at the middle of the 20th century. In 1951, William F. Buckley made this the subject of his fascinating, unfailingly provocative, and widely read *God and Man at Yale*. Or take an academic department at a Midwestern state university over the course of a century and a quarter. David S. Brown has now made this the subject of his equally fascinating and often comparably provocative *Beyond the Frontier*, which might just as easily be entitled "Relativism and Isolationism at Wisconsin."

Beyond the Frontier
The Midwestern Voice in American Historical Writing
by David S. Brown
Chicago, 256 pp., $32.50

Although Brown frames his narrative and analysis in larger regional and cultural terms, the core of this book resides in the department of history of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The professors and students there repeatedly formed the epicenter of a viewpoint toward American society, politics, and foreign policy that greatly influenced the left side of the opinion spectrum. Brown opens the book with a discussion of Midwestern self-consciousness, which will be of interest to anyone who has moved to or visited there from what the denizens call "the East"—pronounced with a special edge and nasality. Whether he succeeds in making his case for a distinctive and significant Midwestern view of American history is debatable. But no matter, Brown engages his real subject when he addresses the growth of state universities in general and Wisconsin in particular, starting with its preeminent historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, who propounded his "frontier thesis" in 1893.

Turner is one of four historians who get named in chapter titles, and the chapter devoted to him distills into a nicely analytical account of his own writings and the much larger corpus of work about him. Brown also recounts how Turner shaped the department that freed the study of American history from a postcolonial inferiority complex and fostered a new viewpoint stressing environmental influences and the importance of ordinary people, particularly away from the Atlantic seaboard. Brown likewise notes how singularly unproductive Turner was when it came to writing books, and how he betrayed a streak of nativism in his attitudes toward the largely Roman Catholic and Jewish "New Immigrants" who flooded into the country in the half-century between the Civil War and World War I—an attitude that would persist in various guises among the later exponents of this hinterland-centered viewpoint.

Next, Brown turns to his second historian named in a chapter title: the other great progenitor of such an angle of attack on American history and affairs, Charles A. Beard. Inasmuch as Beard never studied or taught at Wisconsin, his inclusion might seem to be a detour from the book's main institutional focus; but that is not so, as will soon become apparent. Brown does not make the claim outright, but the overwhelming weight of evidence in

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this book ranks Beard as far and away the most influential historian included here. As Richard Hofstadter (the subject of Brown's excellent previous book) once said, "There was a time when all American history seemed to dance to Beard's tune." Despite repeated attacks on Beard's often slipshod and biased scholarship, and his onetime banishment to pariah status because of his unreconstructed isolationism during and after World War II, a great many practitioners of American history have continued to dance to his tune, as this book shows.

Brown characterizes Beard's views as a mixture of quasi-Marxism, relativism, and rejection of liberal internationalism. He also argues, correctly, that Beard derived those views largely from his Indiana roots, which included Quaker pacifism, Lincoln Republicanism, and progressive idealism. As influential as were his pejorative economic determinism and "continentalism" (the term he and others understandably preferred to isolationism), his greatest influence lay in his relativism, which argued that "objectivity" was a foolish, perverse, impossible notion and that history must necessarily be written selectively for the sake of pursuing "progressive" goals.

Both Beard's foreign policy and his relativism prompted a fierce counterattack in the last years of his life and just after his death by a host of writers, led by the Harvard historian and Boston brahmin Samuel Eliot Morison. Snobbish in manner and blistering in attack (although no more so than Beard himself), Morison nevertheless scored a telling point when, in his presidential address to the American Historical Association, he challenged Beard's relativism head on, declaring that "no person without an inherent loyalty to truth, a high degree of intellectual honesty, and a sense of balance, can be a great or even a good historian."

Beard's inclusion is not really a detour from Brown's institutional story because the history department in Madison led the counterattack against Morison and others. Its leading lights defended Beard and reasserted his viewpoint in several fields of American history, particularly foreign policy. That last assertion of neo-Beardianism flowered in what proudly dubbed itself the "Wisconsin School of Diplomatic History," led by its pugnacious champion, William Appleman Williams, who is the third historian named in a chapter title. Williams deserves that distinction, but another of this book's strengths is that it illuminates the part played by others, students and faculty alike. The eminent Americanists of the department, such as Merrill Jensen, William B. Hesseltine, and Howard K. Beale, pugnaciously maintained their faith in Beard, but his leading defender was the milder-mannered intellectual historian Merle Curti. He organized a volume of essays in honor of Beard, and, in his own presidential address to the AHA, he lashed back at Morison's rejection of relativism.

Bascom Hall, University of Wisconsin, 1953

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Then, in 1959, a group of graduate students, most of them Jewish red-diaper babies from New York, started the journal *Studies on the Left*. Like their professors, they scorned New Deal liberalism at home and internationalism abroad, as well as "objectivity," and they first promulgated the concept of "corporate liberalism," which argued that regulation and state intervention in the economy by progressives and New Dealers actually served the interests of big business. Brown makes an important point when he notes that *SOL* antedated the New Left of the 1960s and anticipated its "hunger for deviance, for some posture of radical dissent that could create new identities."

As for diplomatic history, the Wisconsin School did not spring fully formed from the head of Williams. His major professor during his doctoral studies in the department was a man who also kept faith with Beard's stress on economic motives behind foreign policy and rejected expansionism, Fred Harvey Harrington. Later president of the university, Harrington hired Williams as his successor, and several of the men (no women) who sallied forth to carry the banner of the Wisconsin School in the wider academic world began their graduate studies under Harrington. Much of the influence of Williams and his school, Brown aptly notes, came from good timing: Disillusionment with the Bay of Pigs, the Dominican intervention, and above all, Vietnam spawned receptivity to their baleful reading of the nation's foreign policy. But Brown points out that, as with *SOL*, Williams had formed his views well before any of those events transpired, as had Harrington. In his own writings, Williams largely eschewed research in favor of argument and practiced what he called "seriation quotation," by which he meant weaving together disparate statements and citations in order to elicit what he saw as deeper, hitherto hidden meanings. Both his viewpoint and his practices drew fierce attacks, especially from Oscar Handlin, in a fight that harked back to Morison's assaults on Beard. This time, however, the assailant from Harvard was not a Brahmin but one of its history department's first Jewish professors, and the son of immigrants.

Although Williams and *SOL* anticipated the counterculture of the 1960s, the student unrest of that decade and its

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attendant violence did not find cheerleaders among these erstwhile prophets. Harrington recoiled from the turmoil, particularly on his own campus, which eventually cost him his presidency. He also privately repudiated Williams, even though his former protégé also disliked what he saw and eventually left Madison for a reclusive life in Oregon. The Wisconsin School gained broader acceptance among diplomatic historians, although many in the field still strongly dispute its interpretations and deplore its influence. Revealingly, many of its proponents still call themselves "revisionists," even though their own views are now the targets for would-be revisionists. Neither the Wisconsin School nor the Beardian persuasion holds sway in the home department any longer, but a new and creative incarnation of the original impulse toward viewing American history has begun to take hold there.

Brown ends his book with that new incarnation, but not before he makes one last detour. The final historian who earns a chapter title is Christopher Lasch, a widely read historian and critic of American culture. The son of Nebraskans, born in Omaha and raised there and in the Chicago suburbs, Lasch appears to Brown to offer another good example of a heartland perspective on the nation's past, and he presents a perceptive explication of Lasch's life and writings. But unlike the detour to Beard, this one strikes me as leading nowhere in particular, since Lasch had no special interaction with most of the other historians treated here, except when he turned down an offer from Wisconsin in part because of his distaste for student radicalism there. In the last chapter, Brown cites Andrew Bacevich and Thomas Frank, both native Midwesterners, as latter-day exponents of the earlier viewpoint because one deplores "empire" and the other excoriates unchecked capitalism. Their inclusion in a peculiarly Midwestern viewpoint also strikes me as a stretch.

What does seem eminently fitting at the end of the book is Brown's mention of the revival of Turnerian themes at Wisconsin through the work of William Cronon. Infusing his work with a keen sense of place—particularly Madison, where he grew up as the son of a member of the history department—Cronon both criticizes and bows to the founder: "Turner's notion of the 'frontier' may be so muddled as to be useless, but if Turner's 'free land' is a special case of . . . American abundance, then the general direction of Turner's approach remains sound." In addition, Cronon credits Turner with bringing to the study of human history a keen appreciation of the physical world, which lies at the heart of the field he himself has pioneered, environmental history. Appropriately, Cronon lives only a few blocks from Turner's last home in Madison, and he is currently at work on what he calls a "Michener-scale" history of a locality in Wisconsin from the Ice Age to the present. Since the locality is Portage, which was Turner's home town, the circle is complete.

I commend this book to anyone who wants to see how a small, seemingly narrow subject can open up a world of wider importance. Much of what Brown treats in these pages is the history of the intellectual left in 20th-century America, which fell into a virtual civil war along lines that were at once geographic, ethnic, and intellectual. He makes no secret of his liking for most of his leading characters, and his insistence on the continuing validity and relevance of Beard's foreign policy views will not sit well with some readers. But Brown takes an uncritical stance toward nobody, and he writes with unfailing verve and perceptiveness. What he might have entitled "Relativism and Isolationism at Wisconsin" is a worthy successor to its comparably titled predecessor about Yale. ♦

B&A

PopThink

What we talk about when we talk about the culture.

BY SONNY BUNCH

In a happy coincidence, three new essay collections hit the bookstore shelves on the same day. The first was a selection of Malcolm Gladwell essays from the *New Yorker*; the second was the sequel to the bestselling *Freakonomics* by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner; the third was a new set of ruminations by the pop culture guru Chuck Klosterman.

What the Dog Saw
And Other Adventures
by Malcolm Gladwell
Little, Brown, 432 pp., $27.99

SuperFreakonomics
Global Cooling, Patriotic Prostitutes and Why Suicide Bombers Should Buy Life Insurance
by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner
Morrow, 288 pp., $29.99

Eating the Dinosaur
by Chuck Klosterman
Scribner, 256 pp., $25

That *What the Dog Saw* and *SuperFreakonomics* would suck up most of the oxygen upon release—and that Klosterman's *Eating the Dinosaur* would get lost in the shuffle—is not especially surprising. Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*—as well as Levitt and Dubner's *Freakonomics*—all remain on the *New York Times*'s paperback nonfiction bestseller list years after their initial publication. Indeed, Gladwell is competing with himself for the top spot on the hardcover list: Both *Outliers* and *What the Dog Saw* resided in the top 10 more than a month after *Dog*'s publication. Klosterman, meanwhile, has been well received critically and commercially, but flies under the radar. This is unfortunate, since his intuitive grasp of pop—the dominant mode of American cultural discourse—gives him more to say about modern American culture than any of the others.

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Gladwell and the *Freaky* twosome tackle life from the same basic perspective: How can assumptions be turned on their heads, and what do those assumptions teach us about the way people look at the world? Indeed, their frame of reference is so similar that the same sources are sometimes used by both in the course of making the same arguments. In a chapter touching on the impact of birthdate on future life successes, Dubner and Levitt are forced to note that

> A few years ago, we wrote a *New York Times Magazine* column, "A Star Is Made," about the birthdate bulge and Ericsson's research on talent. We planned to expand upon it for a chapter in *SuperFreakonomics*. Alas, we ended up discarding the chapter, half-written, for in the time between the column and finishing this book, the field became suddenly crowded with other books that highlighted Ericsson's research, including *Outliers* (by Malcolm Gladwell).

SuperFreakonomics attempts to show that actions often have unintended consequences. They argue, for instance, that it is safer (statistically speaking) to drive home drunk than to walk home drunk. The explanation they give might not fly with the local sheriff after you blow a .13 into the breathalyzer, but it makes plenty of sense to economists and those looking to spice up their cocktail party conversation. Oddly—or maybe not, given the nature of things—Dubner and Levitt's argument in favor of loading up for a highway booze cruise has sparked far less controversy than their comments about global warming. For daring to compare global warming alarmists to religious cultists, for refusing to acquiesce to blind panic and moral preening, for pointing out that human activity accounts for only a tiny portion of carbon dioxide emissions and reducing them to zero would be impossibly expensive, they have been attacked from the left as callous contrarians more concerned with making an interesting argument than in solving the world's problems.

(Needless to say, we didn't see the same reaction when Dubner and Levitt suggested that legalizing abortion led to the decline in crime during the mid-1990s.)

Gladwell's new collection begins with the personal profiles he excels at before turning to the grander think pieces. More ink has been spilled on Gladwell than almost any other nonfiction writer in recent years: His books have been derided as both counterintuitive claptrap and mind-numbing banalities, sometimes within the same pieces of criticism. It's both easy and satisfying to describe him as a glib charlatan: how else to explain the massive sales figures that accompany his work?

> Nothing frustrates me more than someone who reads something of mine or anyone else's and says, angrily, "I don't buy it." Why are they angry? Good writing does not succeed or fail on the strength of its ability to persuade. It succeeds or fails on the strength of its ability to engage you, to make you think, to give you a glimpse into someone else's head.

Criticism of Gladwell often strikes me as a little unfair, but this retort reeks of false magnanimity: If all he cared about was engaging readers, he should be thrilled they're expending the mental energy needed to get worked up about his writing. But he's not looking for engagement; he's looking for genuflection.

Klosterman, meanwhile, would be amused by genuflection, though he shouldn't be: Now that David Foster Wallace has died, there's no writer with a better understanding of pop culture and how it affects the American psyche. Given the dominance of pop—music, art, movies—amongst the masses, it's fair to say that there's no writer who better understands the American cultural landscape as the Baby Boomers recede into the distance and the Gen X/Millennials come to the fore.

It's a different expertise than that of, say, David Brooks, who is more attuned to the inner workings of upper-middle class life. Within Klosterman's circles, phrases like Status Income Disequilibrium don't mean much; grappling with the importance of Kurt Cobain's death carries far greater resonance for a far broader swath of this society. That may be a sad comment on American intellectual life, but it's almost certainly true.

Klosterman's career as a journalist, music and film critic, and cultural essayist has kept him in constant touch with society's moving tides and afforded him an insight into the way its evolution affects everyday living and the ways we see ourselves. He explains how sitcom laugh tracks have permeated our lives so thoroughly that two friends can't carry on a discussion without conversation-bridging titters, and why the shared failure of Werner Herzog and Ralph Nader to comprehend irony renders them incapable of navigating the modern world—and leaves the modern world unable to understand them.

But his dissection of Ralph Sampson's career is the highlight of *Eating the Dinosaur*. In "What We Talk About When We Talk About Ralph Sampson," Klosterman sheds more light on the culture of celebrity in fewer words than I would have thought possible. Sampson was a center for the Houston Rockets, and despite being a preternaturally gifted college basketball player and physical specimen unlike any the game had ever seen, he fizzled in the NBA. He has become a symbol of unfulfilled talent, shorthand for inexplicable failure. His life-defining disappointment—along with the existence of such celebutards as Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton—"are the unifying entities within this meta era. In a splintered society, they are the means through which people devoid of creativity communicate with each other. . . . They allow Americans to unilaterally agree on something they never needed to consciously consider." Sampson was "needed to remind people that their own self-imposed mediocrity is better than choking on transcendence."

If there has been a better summation of the modern impulse to build celebrities up, only to tear them down shortly thereafter, I haven't seen it. It's the driving ethos of our age, seen in the world of politics, celebrity, and sports, as Tiger Woods can attest, and it's not going away anytime soon. ♦

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B&A

Craftsman-Master

A quiet, darkened place to contemplate Dürer's genius.

BY SUSANNE KLINGENSTEIN

Boston

It is still possible in our time of the blockbuster/must-see show to leave a low-key, one-room exhibition in an American museum in that state of elation and happiness that comes with the experience of having spent a rich hour or two in the presence of intense and exquisite works of art.

Boston's Museum of Fine Arts has just opened with little fanfare a small show of prints by the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). Wedged incongruously between a show of austere photographs by Harry Callahan and the museum's permanent display of Oceanic artifacts, the slightly darkened Dürer room contains some of the greatest and best-known prints by the artist, including superb sheets of the so-called three master engravings of 1513-14: "St. Jerome in His Study," "Knight, Death and the Devil," and the ever-enigmatic "Melencolia I."

One may naturally quarrel with the decision to pull just 45 prints from extensive holdings of 500 works by Dürer. But for visitors, the enforced focus on the absolutely great means that they may proceed from highpoint to high point without having to descend into the valley of lesser works or alternate sheets, and that they may greet the assembled cultural icons like a party of old friends. The problem with such rigorous exclusiveness, however, is that none of the series are shown in full—not the riveting "Apocalypse" or the moving "Large Passion" or the charming "Life of the Virgin." It also means that the show could not be hung chronologically, enabling the visitor to trace the effects of Dürer's two sojourns in Italy (1494-95 and 1505-07), where he deeply absorbed the new insights incorporated by Venetian and Florentine painters into their craft regarding perspective and the depiction of an idealized human form; and his last journey to the Netherlands (1520-21), which resulted in a flurry of portraits. Curator Clifford S. Ackley has solved the problem by hanging the prints in thematic groups, which work more or less well as ensembles.

Albrecht Dürer
Virtuoso Printmaker
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Until July 3, 2010

'Knight, Death and the Devil' (ca. 1513)

HERBERT F. JOHNSON MUSEUM OF ART / ASSOCIATED PRESS

One of the very good groups presents four images of St. Jerome. The 1496 engraving of "St. Jerome in Penitence" shows the half-naked saint fasting in a rocky, vaguely Alpine setting that allowed Dürer to show off his rapidly developing competence with the engraver's burin as he sought to represent the different textures of smooth sun-lit and mossy crumbling stone. "St. Jerome in His Cell" (1514) shows the saint at work at his desk in a comfortably furnished, though tight, interior without much depth. The 1512 drypoint "St. Jerome Seated near a Pollard Willow," one of only three drypoints Dürer ever made, locates a slightly surly looking old man once again outside amid craggy rocks. The soft lines produced by the slightly smudgy dry point technique create an incongruously velvety atmosphere that contradicts the austerity of the rough setting. Yet the fur of the iconic lion appears realistically smooth compared with the stylized hairiness of his counterpart in the woodcut. And finally, the *pièce de résistance*, "St. Jerome in his Study" (1514), in which Dürer's use of exact geometrical perspective creates an atmosphere of enchanted beatitude. At the far end of an orderly sun-drenched room, whose threshold is guarded by a dozing lion, we see the saint calmly at work on his Bible translation. The print displays Dürer's mastery of both engraving technique and composition. The extreme shortness of the perspective distance, combined with the lowness of the horizon, determined by the eye level of the seated saint, creates a sense of intimacy; while the high variability of light and shade on the various surfaces of the room, achieved by Dürer's masterful handling of the burin, brings the room to life.

In the immense literature about Albrecht Dürer, this depiction of St. Jerome is usually not seen as the high point of his six depictions of the saint,

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but as the counterpoint both to the 1513 master engraving "Knight, Death and the Devil," representing *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, respectively, and to "Melencolia I," contrasting the intellectual life in service to God to (as Erwin Panofsky put it) "what may be called a life in competition with God."

The complications that suddenly seem to open up in one's reading of Dürer's prints remind me of a sentence in the great (but long out of print) *Saturn and Melancholy* by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, in which the three authors declare, à propos of their 400-page deciphering effort of "Melencolia I," that "it is in fact the distinction of a great work of art, that whether it represents a bunch of asparagus or a subtle allegory it can, on one particular level, be understood by the naïve observer and the scientific analyst alike."

The truth of that sentence seemed revealed when, on a recent Sunday, crowds in sneakers and sweatshirts and pumps and pearls were stacked three-deep around the modest-sized prints. And it is true that certain pictures seem immediately accessible, such as the seemingly plebeian "Prodigal Son" (1496) with its merciless depiction of slightly devilish swine surrounding a remorseful young man; or its counterpoint, the aristocratic "St. Eustace" (1501), with its realistic depiction of courtly animals (hunting dogs, horse, and stag). And surely it was quite witty of Ackley to hang the very early "Young Woman Attacked by Death" (1494) next to the mysterious "Abduction of a Young Woman on a Unicorn" (1516), since in the first picture Death does not appear as your ordinary medieval skeleton but as a *senex amans* looking a bit disheveled by the onset of decomposition. The prints' proximity highlights the fact that both images portray the rape of a young woman.

But easy accessibility ends if not with the stately "Knight, Death and the Devil," then certainly with its neighbor in the show, "Melencolia I." We see a winged young woman with a dark, brooding face, supporting her head with her left hand that is balled into a fist, the elbow resting on her left knee. She sits idly but is surrounded by items of theoretical and practical geometry, one of the seven liberal arts. A bat is holding the title banner suspended over an overflowing body of water arched by a rainbow. A comet is racing toward a city in the distance and a putto sits absorbed in his scribbling on a mill, or whetstone, next to a ladder arising out of a polyhedron.

Something is going on here that is not immediately accessible as, say, the print of "The Four Horsemen" is to readers of Revelation. At first flush it appears that here, too, Dürer simply drew on sets of traditional emblems, creating a synthesis of allegorical depictions of melancholy and the arts (especially geometry and astronomy), suggesting an affinity between melancholy and mathematics in imaginative people. But as Panofsky and Saxl showed in their 1923 study of "Melencolia I," Dürer goes radically beyond tradition in this densely encrypted picture, asserting the need of a mathematical foundation for the arts, demanding that the artist have complete technical control over the means of execution, and finally arguing that what is ultimately required for the production of great works is a creative enthusiasm based on an intellectual penetration of the world that may look to outsiders like deep melancholy brooding. In short, Panofsky and Saxl read "Melencolia I" as the portrait of the inner disposition of an artist who felt compelled to achieve perfection in form, content, and execution.

The prints in this show demonstrate amply that Dürer rarely fell short. Leaving the museum the visitor passes through a newly opened gallery with flat print works by Toulouse Lautrec, and you cannot help but mourn how much has gotten lost on the way to modernity. ♦

B&A

Comedy of Air

Fable for our times or tired old formula?

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Up in the Air is one of those movies that comes along every once in a while and asks you to feel sorry for someone who is living a life of joyous irresponsibility. Like Frank Sinatra in *The Tender Trap* and *Come Blow Your Horn*, or Warren Beatty in *Shampoo*, George Clooney in *Up in the Air* is happily and breezily floating through his days. He has broken the code of the modern American traveler and knows everything about how to get through an airport quickly, how to get the best seats on planes, how to zip through security and the check-in line at any hotel, and how to crash a really fun party. He doesn't want to be tied down, he doesn't want to be connected, he doesn't want anything but the life he has.

Up in the Air
Directed by Jason Reitman

And so, of course, his pleasure must be exposed as shallow, his goals as meaningless, his amusements as unworthy. We must come to pity him, because if we don't, we might actually want to be him, and that would be bad. Frank Sinatra's bachelor paradise in *The Tender Trap* must be invaded and destroyed by Debbie Reynolds's perky actress possessed of no ambition but to marry and move to the suburbs. The same with Sinatra's almost identical bachelor paradise in *Come Blow Your Horn*, which he must surrender to win the respect of his father, who considers him a bum. And George, the promiscuous hairdresser cutting a swath through

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Beverly Hills in *Shampoo*, must stand alone and lonely as the only woman he has ever loved—who is a complete tramp, by the way—drives off to marry the 30-years-older man whose mistress she has been.

This odd sub-genre drinks deep from the well of male fantasy, the fantasy of liberation from bourgeois care, and then gets on its high horse. Because, after all, no human being can live in such a fashion! It is just wrong! Having created a vision of easy living that doesn't exist in the first place, these movies smash it to bits, thus (in theory) making us feel better about our drab, humdrum lives.

No such person as Ryan Bingham, the character George Clooney plays in *Up in the Air*, actually exists anywhere on this earth. Mid-forties, unencumbered by ex-wives or children or parents, effortlessly at ease and impossibly good-looking as only George Clooney can be, Ryan is a poster child for the good life just so long as he is not at home in his featureless Omaha apartment.

He was originally conceived by Walter Kirn in the wonderful satirical novel of the same name published in 2001 (and which I reviewed for this magazine). Kirn was writing about the breezy world of American business during the '90s gold rush, as personified by Ryan, a consultant who happily spends most of his time in a place Kirn called AirWorld, reading can-do tomes, collecting frequent-flyer miles, and avoiding the remonstrances of his family.

Kirn's satirical portrait lost its altitude a few months later after the September 11 attacks; one of the consequences of those attacks is that the pleasures to be found in AirWorld are not what they once were. Nor is the business culture after the economic meltdown the transmitter of sunny platitudes it was at the time when Kirn wrote his novel.

As a result, Jason Reitman's acclaimed movie has to find a newly relevant take on Ryan Bingham, and it does so by turning him into an executioner. He is now a consultant who travels the country firing white-collar workers so their bosses don't have to. The dappled breeziness of Kirn's book gives way to the fluorescent bleakness of Reitman's portrayal of listless, hopeless middle-management America—a featureless series of office parks with featureless offices in featureless flyover cities.

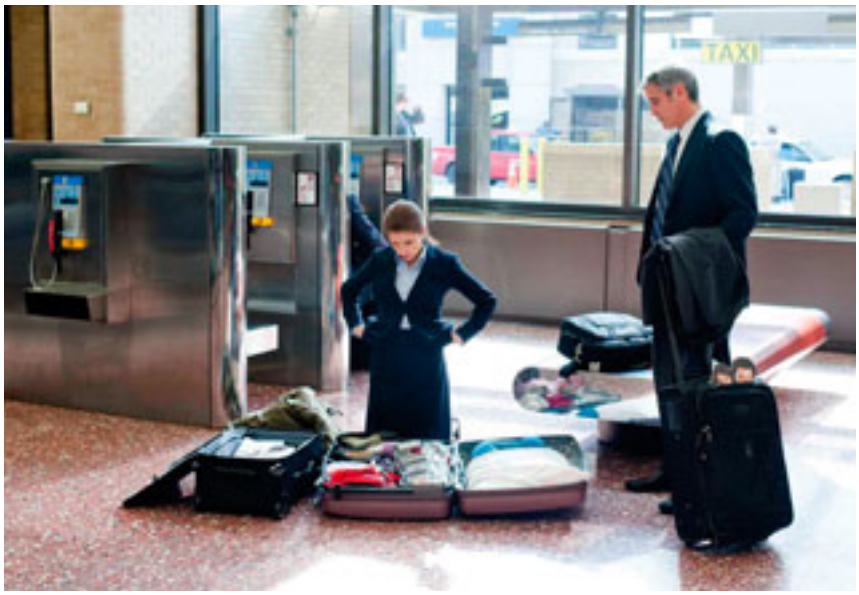
The general critical consensus has been that *Up in the Air* offers a wonderfully compassionate view of the new economic nightmare, but it struck me as a work of almost limitless condescension, a portrayal of an America in which Omaha is the same as Kansas City is the same as Des Moines.

Ryan's life is thrown into crisis when his firm begins to play with a new system of firing people over broadband—doing so through a computer terminal, so that it won't have to pay Ryan's travel bills. This means Ryan will have to spend his days in the home office in Omaha, which is his idea of hell on earth.

The distance-firing bit is Reitman's effort (along with screenwriter Sheldon Turner) to work in some of Kirn's biz-world satire, but it makes no sense. Since we're told in the movie's first few minutes that Bingham is brought in because bosses are too cowardly to can their employees, how could his firm even consider such a plan?

The movie's tone is uncertain, veering between heightened parody and documentary realism. Some critics are taking the uncertainty for complexity, but the satire isn't especially funny and the realism isn't especially believable. That is particularly true when it comes to Ryan's own emotional awakening at the hands of a sultry woman he meets in a hotel bar and whose company he secures to attend his sister's wedding in the pathetic home town in Wisconsin he has been fleeing from all his life.

Ryan falls in love with the sultry woman, though not for any real reason other than that the schematic plot devised by Reitman and Turner demands it, and then, instantly, he is no longer happy skating through life. He even loses faith in the corporate self-help mantra he's been trying to market and walks off the stage in the middle of a speech in Las Vegas in a scene that is a bizarre plagiarism of an earlier Clooney comedy misfire, *Intolerable Cruelty* (and an occurrence that would never, ever happen in real life). Being free of encumbrance is gall and wormwood to him.



Anna Kendrick, George Clooney

PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Up in the Air doesn't really attempt to be a credible portrait of anything. It is, rather, intended to be a vision of the Way We Live Now. And in its hopeless autumnal gloom, maybe it does succeed at that. But it can only do so by taking its happy-go-lucky protagonist and turning him into just another Sad Sack for his own good. *Up in the Air* is a buzzkill. ♦

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"A third uninvited guest made his way into the White House state dinner for India's prime minister in November, the Secret Service said Monday."
—Associated Press, *January 4, 2010*

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JOE BIDEN IDENTIFIED AS FOURTH WHITE HOUSE CRASHER

Gibbs: 'We Just Didn't Think He'd Be Interested in Coming'

By JEFF ZELENY

WASHINGTON — A fourth uninvited guest to the White House state dinner for Indian prime minister Monmohan Singh has now been identified as Vice President Joseph Biden. "Needless to say, this is quite an embarrassment for the agency," said Ed Donovan, a spokesperson for the U.S. Secret Service. "The vice president is fairly recognizable and can often be heard before he is even seen. But he managed to finagle his way inside by chatting up security personnel and regaling them with stories about his father, a car salesman, and the bleakness of Scranton, Pennsylvania."

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs described the situation as "delicate," telling reporters that "we were under the impression the vice president was on a train back to Delaware. Or on a plane to Europe. Or at a Pacific Rim conference. So even if we wanted to invite him, we thought he wouldn't be able to make it. Also, we just didn't think he'd be interested in coming. I guess we should have asked." Still, Mr. Gibbs commended the White House staff for its quick response, pretending the vice president was an invited guest and providing him with a handwritten name tag.

Another White House adviser, speaking on the condition of anonymity, was more direct, however, saying, "Biden was definitely not on the list. It's not that the president feared he could cause any physical harm—we do have metal detectors—but he was more concerned about a possible verbal gaffe that could lead to an international incident, maybe even nuclear war." Added the adviser, "Joe means well, but you just never know."

Photo via Newscom

Vice President Biden, who asked for his photo to be taken with Tareq and Michaele Salahi, invited the crashers to an after-party at his residence. They declined.

Indeed, Vice President Biden was seen giving India's ambassador to the United States a bottle of Barefoot wine and asking him if he'd seen the movie 'Gandhi.' Mr. Biden supposedly complained the film was too long and left him, like Gandhi, starving. The vice president issued a statement yesterday explaining that "It was my intention all along to attend the state dinner, considering the number of gas stations and 7-Elevens that dot my state, so to speak. And I was determined to ask the prime minister if his government had recovered the Sankara stones, banned child labor in the mines beneath Pankot Palace, and outlawed the human sacrifices of the Thuggee Cult within the Temple of

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ARENAS ADMITS CAR BOMB ALSO FAKE, 'BAD JOKE'

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